

# Living By The Words Of Bhagavan



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by  
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India

By the same author :  
**Be As You Are**  
**No Mind - I am the Self**  
**Papaji**

Published by Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram Trust,  
Annamalai Swami Ashram, Palakottu,  
Sri Ramanasramam P.O., Tiruvannamalai 606603,  
Tamil Nadu., India

© Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram Trust, 1994  
Second edition 1995  
Phototypeset and printed at  
All India Press, Kennedy Nagar, Pondicherry 605001

Second reprint 1998  
Printed at  
Sri Venkatesa Printing House, Chennai 600 026

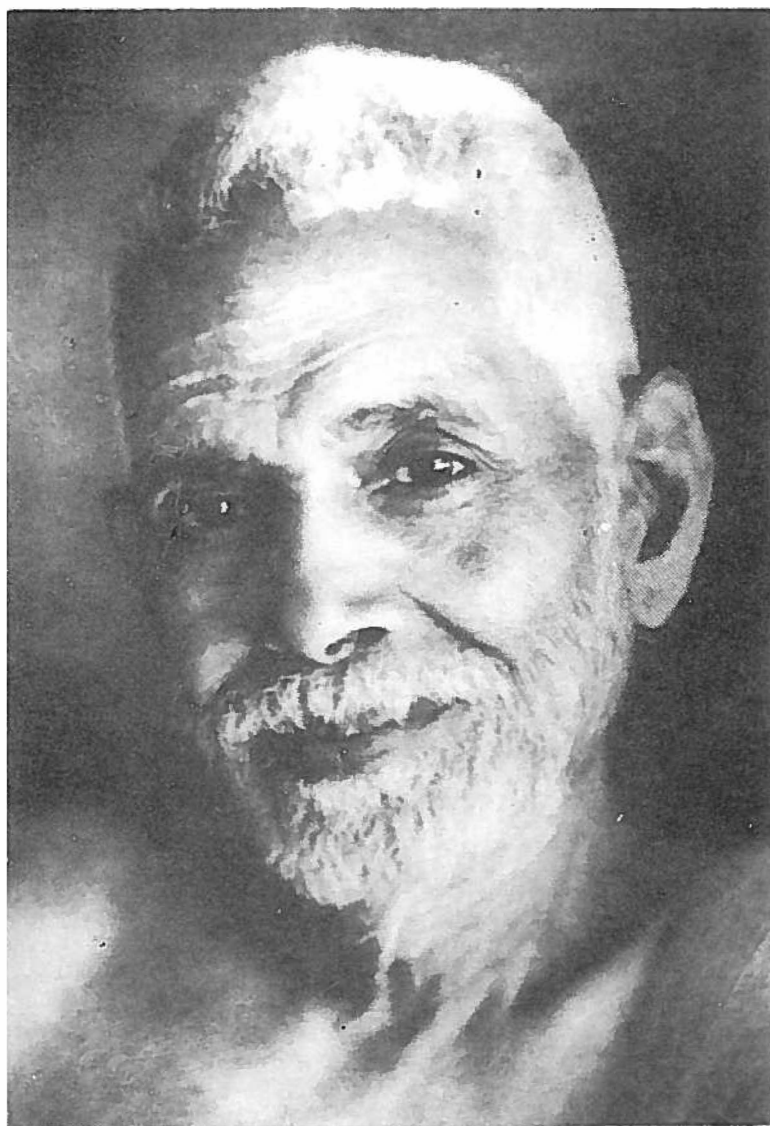
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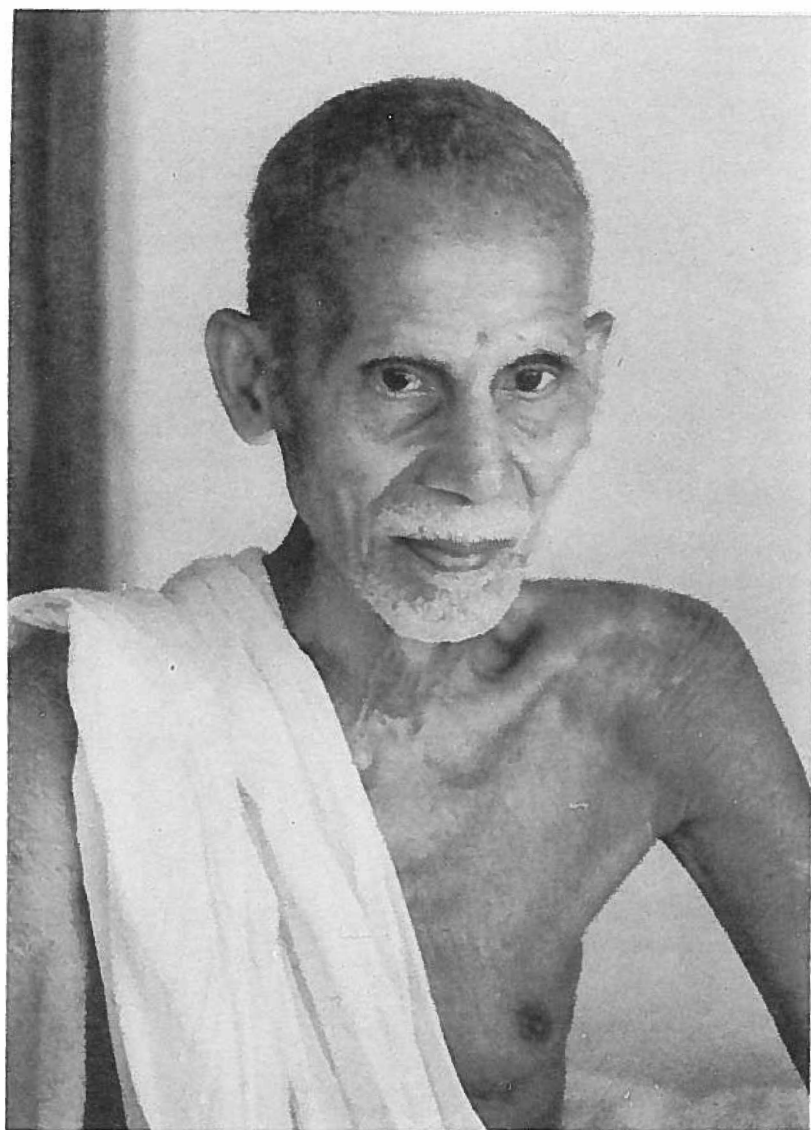
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Cover design & Arunachala photograph  
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Computer image processing  
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BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI



Sri Annamalai Swami

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# Introduction

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is widely acknowledged as being one of the outstanding Indian Gurus of modern times. In 1896, while he was still a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, he realised the Self during a dramatic death experience that lasted about twenty minutes. Since at that time he had had no previous exposure to spiritual thought or practice, he initially found the experience rather perplexing. In the first few weeks after his realisation he alternately thought that he had either been taken over by a spirit or afflicted by a strange but rather pleasant disease. He told no one about the experience and tried to carry on living the life of a normal South Indian schoolboy. In the days that followed he succeeded with his pretense, but after about six weeks he became so disenchanted with the mundane trivia of school and family life he decided to leave home and find a place where he could rest quietly in his experience of the Self without having any untoward interruptions or distractions.

He elected to go to Arunachala, a famous holy mountain located about 120 miles south-west of Madras. The choice was far from random: in his early years he had always felt a sense of awe when the name Arunachala was mentioned. In fact, before his misapprehension was corrected by a relative, he had thought that Arunachala was some heavenly realm rather than an earth-bound pilgrimage centre that could be reached by public transport. In later years he would tell people that Arunachala was his Guru, and sometimes he would also say that it was the power of Arunachala which had brought about his realisation and had subsequently drawn him to its physical form.

The young Ramana Maharshi took great pains to ensure that no one in his family knew where he was going. He left his home secretly and arrived at Arunachala, after a rather adventurous journey, three days later. He spent the remaining fifty-four years of his life on or near the holy mountain, refusing to leave it even for a day.

On his first day there he threw away all his money and possessions except for a loincloth, shaved his head as a sign of spiritual renunciation, and found a quiet place in the precincts of

the main Arunachala temple where he could sit undisturbed. In the four or five years that followed he spent nearly all his time sitting with his eyes closed in various temples and shrines, completely absorbed in an overwhelming awareness of the Self. He was occasionally fed by a sympathetic visitor or pilgrim, and later by a regular attendant, but, except for one short period when he went out begging for his food, he displayed no interest in his bodily welfare or in the events of the world that were going on around him.

In 1901 he moved to Virupaksha Cave, situated about 300 feet up the mountain behind the main temple, and remained there for most of the next fourteen years. As time went by he began to show a little interest in the visitors who came to see him but he rarely spoke. He was still content to spend most of each day sitting in silence or wandering around on the slopes of Arunachala. He had begun to attract devotees while he was still sitting motionless in the temple. By the time he moved to Virupaksha Cave he already had a small group of followers who were occasionally supplemented by visiting pilgrims.

There is a Sanskrit word, *tapas*, which means an intense spiritual practice, accompanied by physical self-denial or even bodily mortification, through which one's spiritual impurities are systematically burnt off. Some people were attracted to him because they felt that a man who had performed such intense *tapas* (in his early years in the temple he often sat for days without moving) must have acquired great spiritual power. Others were attracted to him because they felt a palpable radiance of love and joy emanating from his physical form.

Ramana Maharshi made it clear in later years that he had not been doing any form of *tapas* or meditation in his early years at Arunachala. If he was ever asked about this he would say that his Self-realisation had occurred during the death experience in his family's house in 1896 and that his subsequent years of silent, motionless sitting were merely a response to an inner urge to remain completely absorbed in the experience of the Self.

In his last few years at Virupaksha Cave he began to talk to visitors and answer their spiritual queries. He had never been completely silent but in his early years at Arunachala his words had been few and far between. The teachings he gave out came from his own inner experience of the Self, rather than from

respects to the teachings of *Advaita Vēdānta*, an ancient and well-regarded school of Indian philosophy which maintains that the Self (*Ātman*) or *Brahman* is the only existing reality and that all phenomena are indivisible manifestations or appearances within it. The ultimate aim of life according to both Ramana Maharshi and earlier *advaita* teachers is to transcend the illusion that one is an individual person who functions through a body and a mind in a world of separate, interacting objects. Once this has been achieved one becomes aware of what one really is: the Self, which is immanent, formless consciousness.

Ramana Maharshi's family had managed to track him down in the 1890s but he had refused to return to the family home. In 1914 his mother decided to go and live with her son at Arunachala and spend her remaining years with him. In 1915 he, his mother and the group of devotees who resided at Virupaksha Cave moved further up the hill to Skandashram, a little ashram which had been built specially for him by one of his early devotees.

Prior to this time the devotees who were living with Ramana Maharshi had gone begging in the local town for their food. Hindu religious renunciants, called *sādhus* or *sannyāsins*, often support themselves in this way. Mendicant monks have always been part of the Hindu tradition and no stigma is attached to those who beg for religious reasons. When Bhagavan (I shall mostly call him by this title in future since this is how he was addressed by nearly all his devotees) moved to Skandashram, his mother began to cook regular meals for all the people who lived there. She soon became an ardent devotee of her son and made such rapid spiritual progress that, with the aid of Bhagavan's grace and power, she was able to realise the Self at the moment of her death in 1922.

Her body was buried on the plain that bordered the southern side of Arunachala. A few months later Bhagavan, prompted by what he later called 'the divine will', left Skandashram and went to live next to the small shrine which had been erected over her body. In the years that followed a large ashram grew up around him. Visitors from all over India, and later from abroad, came to see him to ask his advice, to seek his blessings or merely to bask in his peace-giving radiance. By the time he passed away in 1950 at the age of seventy he had become something of a national institution—a physical embodiment of all the finer points of a Hindu tradition that stretched back thousands of years.

His fame and his attractive power did not derive from any miracles he performed. He exhibited no special powers and poured scorn on those who did. Nor did his fame derive to any great extent from his teachings. It is true that he extolled the virtues of a hitherto little-known spiritual practice, but it is also true that most other aspects of his teachings had been taught by generations of Gurus before him. What caught the minds and the hearts of his visitors was the impression of saintliness that one immediately felt in his presence. He led a simple austere life; he gave equal respect and consideration to all devotees who approached him for help; and, perhaps most importantly, he effortlessly radiated a power which was perceived by all those who were near him as a feeling of peace or well-being. In Bhagavan's presence, awareness of being an individual person was often replaced by a full awareness of the immanent Self.

Bhagavan made no attempt to generate this energy, nor did he make any conscious effort to transform the people around him. The transmission of the power was spontaneous, effortless and continuous. If transformations took place because of it, they came about because of the receiver's state of mind, not through any of Bhagavan's decisions, desires or actions.

Bhagavan was fully aware of these radiations and he frequently said that the transmission of this energy was the most important and the most direct part of his teachings. The verbal and written teachings he gave out and the various meditation techniques he endorsed were all, he said, only for those who were unable to remain attuned to the flow of grace that was constantly emanating from him.

Many people have written about Bhagavan's life, his teachings and the experiences which various devotees had with him. It is now more than forty years since Bhagavan passed away and one would be forgiven for assuming that virtually all the significant stories about him have already been published in one form or another. I was inclined towards this view until 1987 when I went to interview an elderly devotee of Bhagavan called Annamalai Swami. I was soon forced to revise my opinion. Over the course of several weeks he told me so many interesting, unpublished stories about Bhagavan and the devotees who lived with him, I decided to write them all down in the form of a first person narrative and

publish them. Annamalai Swami gave me his permission and subsequently read my account to make sure that all his stories had been accurately recorded. I have annotated his account with comments of my own. Most of them explain obscure points in the text but some of them provide background information or relevant additional stories which were unknown to Annamalai Swami.

I would like to thank Sri S. Sundaram for acting as my interpreter, Kumara Swami for translating Annamalai Swami's diary into English, Satya for transcribing all the talks that appear in the final chapter, Sri Ramanasramam for permitting me to use material from their photo archives, Nadhia Sutara for general editorial assistance, and Jagruti and several other members of Satsang Bhavan, Lucknow, for typing and preparing the final draft.

David Godman  
Lucknow, India  
March 1994

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### Italicised Words

There is a glossary at the end of the book which defines many of the Tamil and Sanskrit words which appear in the text. I have not used the standard diacritical marks since these tend to confuse the uninitiated. However I have indicated long vowels in the following way:

- ā* is pronounced like the 'a' in 'father'
- ē* like the 'a' in 'able'
- ī* like the 'ee' in 'fee'
- ū* like the 'oo' in 'coo'
- ō* like the 'o' in 'so'

The *sh* and *ch* combinations are pronounced in the English way, but the other *h* letters are aspirates. For example:

- dh* like the 'd h' in 'hard hat'
- th* like the 't h' in 'fast horse'

## Coming to Bhagavan

I was born in Tondankurichi, a small village of about 200 houses, in 1906. My father, a man of many talents, was an important person in the village. In addition to being a farmer, an astrologer, a painter and a builder, he also knew how to construct statues and make *gōpurams* [temple towers]. Soon after I was born my father and another astrologer met to discuss my horoscope. Both of them came to the conclusion that I was likely to become a *sannyāsin* [a Hindu monk who has renounced all ties with his family and the world]. My father, who was not pleased by this prediction, decided to try to avert the possibility by denying me a proper education. He had the notion that if I never learned to read and write properly, I would never read the scriptures and never develop an interest in God. Because of my father's belief in this prediction I only received a very rudimentary education at the local village school. When I had just about mastered the alphabet I was taken out of school and set to work assisting my father in his fields.

My father, suspecting that I might try to go back to school without his knowledge or consent, tried to ensure that I remained virtually illiterate by telling my mother, 'If he goes to school again, don't give him any food'.

A short time after I was taken out of school, when I was passing through a nearby village called Vepur, I heard a visiting scholar give a lecture.

He told the villagers, 'It is good to become educated. Even if you have to support yourself by begging while you are studying, you should study as much as you can. Only through education can we know about the mysteries of life.'

On returning home I went to my father and complained, 'I listened to a scholar in Vepur today who talked about the value of education. You are not permitting me to go to school. Why is this?'

My father dismissed my challenge by saying, 'Oh, we are just farmers. We only need to be able to write well enough to sign our names.'

Since I was not satisfied with my father's attitude or answer, I

decided to try to study by myself. I got hold of two books, one containing the stories of King Vikramaditya and the other the verses of Pattinatar [a 9th century Tamil poet and saint], and tried to teach myself to read. By a curious coincidence, one of the first verses by Pattinatar that I managed to decipher summarised prophetically the spiritual path that I tried to follow for most of my life:

The one who renounces the home is *crores* [tens of millions] of times greater than the one who, living as a householder, does many *punyas* and *dharma*s [meritorious acts]. The one who renounces the mind is *crores* of times greater than the one who renounces the home. The one who has transcended the mind and all duality, how can I express the greatness of that person?

Although I had never come across statements like this before, I had always had a natural inclination towards the spiritual life. Nobody had ever talked to me about religious matters, but somehow I had always known that there was a higher power called God, and that the purpose of life was to attain this God. Without being told, I instinctively felt that everything I saw was somehow illusory and not real. These thoughts, along with the idea that I should not become attached to anything in this world, were part of my consciousness even in my earliest boyhood.

I remember one incident which happened when I was only six years old. I was walking with my mother near the village when a *sādhū* [a Hindu monk] in orange robes walked by.

I asked my mother, 'When will I become a *sannyāsin* like him?' Without waiting for an answer, I started walking along the road behind the *sādhū*.

As I was walking I heard my mother expressing her disgust to the local village women: 'Look what a useless boy he is! Even at this young age he is trying to be a *sādhū*.'

*Literally, 'sādhū' means 'noble person'. The term is more commonly used to describe anyone who is following a Hindu spiritual path full time, particularly if he has left his home to do it. Sannyāsins who have formally renounced all ties with the world in order to pursue a spiritual quest are often called sādhus.*

My father, unfortunately, did not share my religious predilections.

He did do an elaborate *pūjā* [ceremonial worship of a Hindu deity] every day for about half an hour, but his motives were entirely materialistic.

Once, while I was still a young boy, I asked him, 'Why are you doing this *pūjā* every day?'

He replied, 'I want to get wealth, I want to get land, I want to get gold and a lot of money'.

I told him, 'These things are all perishable. Why are you praying for these perishable things?'

My father was astonished that I had an understanding of such matters at such an early age.

'How do you know that these things are perishable?' he demanded.

'I know, that is why I am telling you,' I replied.

The knowledge was inside me but I couldn't explain it or account for it in any rational way.

When my father discovered that I was taking an interest in spiritual matters, he tried to discourage me. He put many obstacles in my path and it was not until many years later that he finally conceded that I was destined to become a *sādhu*.

While I was still quite young the villagers adopted me as a kind of good-luck mascot. Whenever anyone began to build a new house, I would be asked to put in the first frame. I was asked to pull out the first weed when the weeding started in the fields and during marriages I would be asked to touch the statue of Ganapati at the beginning of the ceremony. The most pleasant chore, though, was eating sweets. Whenever people in the village prepared sweets for a special occasion, I would be invited to come and share them. I don't know when the villagers first came to believe that I would bring them good luck, or how they arrived at this conclusion, but the tradition persisted till I was about thirteen years of age.

*Some people seem to be endowed with extraordinary good luck, so much so that everything they do prospers or succeeds. In Tamil Nadu these people are often given the nickname 'Golden Hand'. They are in great demand as inaugurators of festivals or social functions because it is believed that anything they start will be successful.*

*Ramana Maharshi also had the nickname 'Golden Hand'. In his*

*youth, when he frequently played football with his friends, it was soon noticed that the side he played for always won. Annamalai Swami must have displayed similar luck in order to have been adopted as the village mascot.*

I was never a gregarious child. Instead of mixing with the other people in the village, I sought out uninhabited places where I could sit and practise inner quietness. My favourite place was a Vinayaka temple in the forest near the village. I would often go there and pray to the deity. I was so ignorant of religious rites in those days that I didn't even know how to prostrate properly before the deity. I only learned how to do it by copying a small girl who came to the temple and did a very elaborate *ashtāṅga namaskāram* in front of the temple image.

*This is a full-length prostration during which eight different parts of the body touch the ground.*

I became more acquainted with religious rituals on a visit to Vriddhachalam, a Saivite pilgrimage centre near my village. I observed some brahmins doing *anushtānas* there and asked them to initiate me into these practices. They refused on the grounds that sudras [members of the lowest caste] were not permitted to practise these rites.

*Anushtānas include a wide variety of ritual practices which are usually only performed by brahmins. Some are religious but others merely relate to personal hygiene.*

Soon afterwards I saw some non-brahmin Saivites [followers of Siva] performing the same rituals. They had apparently learned how to perform these rites from a book which contained a detailed description of them. I learned these *anushtānas* from this group and performed them regularly when I returned to my village. My father had, despite his rather cynical attitude to religion, previously initiated me into *Sūrya Namaskāram*, a well-known ritual in which one repeats a number of *mantras* and then prostrates to the rising sun. I added these new rituals to this one which my father had already taught me.

I adopted one other practice: each month, on *ēkādasī* day [the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight], I tried to meditate all night without falling asleep. I soon discovered that if I tried to meditate

in a sitting position I fell asleep. I tried walking meditation, but even that didn't work because I fell asleep while I was walking. After a little experimentation I discovered that I could fight off sleep by taking baths in the local river and by rubbing sand in my thighs to induce pain. I also used to chew a piece of tobacco because I had been told that doing this kept the mind in *rajōguna*.

*According to Hindu philosophy, all creation has three alternating qualities called gunas: sattva (harmony), rajas (activity) and tamas (inertia). These three qualities also alternate in the mind. Chewing tobacco stimulates the rajas quality and keeps the mind awake and active.*

In my youth I was very keen on maintaining an outward show of piety to demonstrate my commitment to the religious life. I wore a white *dhōti* [a cloth which is worn like a skirt], covered my head in imitation of Ramalinga Swami [a 19th century Tamil saint], and put a lot of *vibhūti* [sacred ash] on my forehead and body. I was quite attached to Ramalinga Swami at the time: I had seen a photo of him in the village which impressed me enough to visit Vadalur, the place of his *samādhi* [shrine].

While I was in my early teens I acquired a copy of the tenth part of a work called *Jīva Brahma Aikya Vēdānta Rahasya*. I learned *prāṇāyāma* techniques [yogic breathing exercises] from this book and began to practise them in the temple in the forest. Reading this book brought about in me a desire to make a more thorough study of the scriptures. Ordinarily, this would have been very difficult for a boy in my position, but an unusual combination of circumstances soon permitted me to fulfil my desire. The *karnam* [government accountant] in our village owned many religious books which he had inherited from his father. He had no time to read them because he was *karnam* of three different villages. He led such a busy life that on many days he was not even able to come home at night. His wife, a very devoted woman from Tiruvarur, permitted me to come to the house and read the books. Every day she would prepare food, offer it to the Ganapati statue in her house, and then give the food to me. She herself would only eat after I had consumed this offering. I eventually moved into the *karnam's* house and lived on this food offering that the *karnam's* wife was preparing. Since my parents disapproved of my religious zeal, I completely stopped going to my family home. During this

estrangement, which lasted three years, them.

As I was studying the books I got into the loud. There were many books to choose from were *Kaivalya Navanītam*, books on Ramakrish. the *Tēvārams* of Appar and Jnanasambandhar, tl. and *Bhakta Vijayam*.

*Kaivalya Navanītam is a Tamil work on advait. philosophy; Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a 19th century Bengali saint; Appar and Jnanasambandhar were 6th century Tamil saints whose hymns in praise of Siva are called Tēvārams; Bhakta Vijayam is a collection of stories about famous Marathi saints.*

My readings soon attracted some of the spiritually-minded people in the village. Within a few weeks about ten people began to visit the house regularly in order to listen to my readings. Each evening from about 6–10 p.m. I would read extracts from these books. After each reading we would all talk about the meaning and significance of the texts.

Some of the people from the village went and told my father that I was studying the scriptures and explaining them to other people. My father was surprised to hear this because he had assumed that I was still virtually illiterate. Deciding to investigate the matter himself, he came and secretly listened to one of our evening sessions.

Afterwards he apparently remarked, 'I cannot make him obey me any more. So, I will just give him to God.'

The *karnam's* wife attended most of our meetings. She developed a strong interest in the works we were reciting, became a vegetarian, and lost all interest in worldly matters. Unfortunately she even lost interest in her husband.

One evening he took me aside and said rather angrily, 'Because of your association with my wife she has become like a swami. She has no desires at all any more. I don't want to keep you in my house any more. You must find somewhere else to stay.'

The other devotees overheard what the *karnam* had said.

One of them told me. 'We don't need to do our reading here. We can easily find somewhere else to go.'

At first we thought that we should build a simple coconut-leaf

hut for our meetings but by the end of the evening we had decided to build a proper *math*.

*Maths are Hindu organisations which have been set up for a specific purpose such as honouring the memory of a saint, singing devotional songs, meditation, etc. The larger ones, which usually have a group of resident sādhus, are like monasteries or ashrams.*

Each of us pledged funds to the enterprise and within a short space of time the Sivaram Bhajan Math came into existence. I moved into the *math* as soon as it was finished and continued my *sādhana* [spiritual practice] there by conducting *bhajans* [devotional songs] and by reading aloud the teachings of various saints.

When the *math* was finished I built a *tannūr pandal* [a place which serves free food and drinks to travellers and poor people] on the main road that went through our village. With the help of some devotees I collected enough funds to serve *kanji* [rice gruel] every day to *sādhus* and travellers who passed through the village.

Soon after I had established myself in the *math* my parents decided to make one last attempt to wean me away from the spiritual life.

As I was about seventeen years of age at the time they thought, 'If we don't take action soon he will almost certainly become a *sannyāsin*. If we can find some girl to marry him, he may become a normal householder and give up all these spiritual activities. Perhaps he will then become like all the rest of us.'

Without even bothering to consult me about the matter, they found a girl, made all the arrangements with her family, and then went out and bought all the provisions that are necessary to celebrate a wedding. I heard about all these activities through one of the women devotees who used to come to the Bhajan Math. As soon as I found out what was going on I informed my parents that they should stop making preparations for a wedding because I had no intention of getting married to anyone.

This outright refusal to obey my parents on such an important matter provoked a major crisis in the village. Many of the people there came to the conclusion that I was mad, partly because I refused to get married, and partly because I insisted on spending all my time thinking about God and singing *bhajans*. Many of these people (my parents were not among them) had a meeting

and decided to cure my madness by violent means. They collected me from the Bhajan Math, took me to a nearby lake, made a large cut in the top of my head and started rubbing lemon juice in it. This, apparently, was a cure for madness. Then they decided to pour buckets of cold water over my head. I think that they must have poured about fifty buckets over me. While they were bathing me in this way I kept quiet and practised *prāṇāyāma* to keep my mind off the cold. I knew that it was useless to resist. When the villagers saw that I wasn't reacting in any way to the treatment they became even more convinced that I was mad. Finally, when the treatment was over, they took me to one of the houses in the village. There, they made a sambar [spicy sauce] out of bitter gourd and made me eat it because they were under the impression that bitter gourd was another cure for insanity. About 100 people had gathered to watch all this.

While I was eating one of them said to me, 'You are a good boy, born in a good family, but you have gone mad'.

By this time my patience was finally exhausted.

'I have ~~not~~ gone mad,' I replied in a rather irritable way. 'Please leave me alone. Tell these people to stop crowding around me or give me a separate room where I can be alone.'

I was not expecting any kind of response, except possibly a further course of 'treatment', but much to my surprise they granted my request and permitted me to retire to one of the rooms in the house. Before they had a chance to change their minds I bolted the door and lay down on the floor to rest and recover from my ordeal.

A little later I got up and tried to meditate. While I was sitting there I overheard the head man of the village discussing my case on the other side of the door.

'If you will permit me, I will get a promise from that boy that he will get married and lead a normal life. Because of these treatments his madness may now have gone.'

He knocked on the door and I let him in.

Standing in front of me he said, very firmly, 'Please give me a promise, because you are not mad any more, that you will get married like all the rest of us and lead a normal householder's life'.

I replied, 'I will promise you instead that I will become a *sannyāsin*'.

I clapped my hands while I was making the promise to show

him how serious I was and to seal the promise. The man left without saying another word.

I heard him exclaiming outside, 'Ayō! Ayō! [a South Indian exclamation indicating surprise or shock] When I asked him to promise one thing, he promised the opposite!'

My family paid no attention to my promise. I heard from a woman who visited me that my father was still secretly making plans to go ahead with the wedding. I therefore decided that it was time to make a few secret plans of my own. First, I wrote a note to the girl who was supposed to be marrying me.

'My intention is to become a *sannyāsin*. I don't intend to get myself entangled in a householder's life. So don't think that you are going to marry me. This will only cause you trouble.'

I arranged for someone to deliver the note to her house. Then, on the same day, I escaped from the house and made my way to Chidambaram [a famous South Indian religious centre].

I intended to take *sannyāsa* there, but I didn't do it in any formal way. Not wanting to go to anyone for initiation, I did everything myself.

*Sannyāsa is the fourth and final stage of life for an orthodox Hindu. In it one renounces all connections with one's family and the world in order to devote all one's time to pursuing union with God or enlightenment. Strictly speaking, one should not become a sannyāsin unless one has been properly initiated by one's Guru or by one of the heads of the various established orders of sannyāsins. However, this rule is often ignored.*

I took a bath in the river, had my head shaved, put a necklace made out of rudraksha seeds around my neck, and dressed myself in a short *dhōti* and towel. I went back to my village in this new garb and announced to everyone that I was now a *sannyāsin*. My new appearance finally convinced my family that I was serious and that I had no intention of marrying. Very reluctantly they abandoned all their marriage plans because they knew that people who become *sannyāsins* remain celibate for the rest of their lives.

I resumed my old routine and started to make plans for the *kumbhābhishēkam* [consecration ceremony] of the *math*. I invited several groups of *bhajan* singers from the surrounding villages and I even persuaded my parents to donate all the provisions that they had bought for my wedding. The food they donated enabled me to

feed about 400 people. The other devotees who had contributed to the construction of the Bhajan Math supplied buttermilk, ragi [a kind of millet] and rice gruel to all the people who came. On the day of the *kumbhābhishēkam* the invited *bhajan* singers paraded through our village, performing in every street. As the *kumbhābhishēkam* rites finally got under way I performed a private ceremony of my own. I did *pāda pūjā* ['foot worship'] to my parents and formally asked their permission to become a *sādhū*.

*Pāda pūjā is a ceremony in which one ritually worships another person's feet. Normally one does pāda pūjā to a Guru or swami as a gesture of great respect. It can also be done to parents or to older members of one's family, but this is far less common.*

I also asked my parents to bless me so that my spiritual career would be successful. They both gave me their permission and they both blessed me. Neither of them ever again tried to dissuade me from following the spiritual path.

A few weeks later I heard that the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram was planning to pass through the village on one of his tours. This is the same Sankaracharya who sent Paul Brunton to Bhagavan.

*Ramana Maharshi became well-known outside India in the 1930s after Paul Brunton, a British journalist, wrote a best-selling book on Indian saints and Gurus entitled A Search in Secret India. Brunton went to the Maharshi after being advised to do so by the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram in 1930. This Sankaracharya died in January 1994, at the age of ninety-nine, as I was preparing the final draft of this book.*

*Sankaracharya Bhagavatpada, the 9th century populariser of advaita, established five maths to propagate his teachings and to uphold Hindu orthodoxy. One of them is located in the South Indian town of Kanchipuram. Each of these maths has had a continuous lineage of teachers which can be traced to the original Sankaracharya. The head of each of these maths assumes the title of Sankaracharya when he begins his period of office. The one whom Annamalai Swami met is widely regarded as being one of India's modern-day saints.*

When I heard this news I decided that I would try to make the

Sankaracharya stop briefly in the village so that I could have his *darshan*.

*Darshan means 'looking at'. In a religious context to have darshan means to see a temple deity or holy man or be seen by him.*

Knowing that there would be many people and animals in his procession, I thought that the best plan would be to supply them all with food and water. If I did this they would all have to halt for a short time while they ate my offerings.

On the appointed day I prepared a large amount of buttermilk and *kanji* for the brahmins who would be accompanying him. I also stocked up on green leaves so that I could feed the horses and the elephants. As the procession approached the village I raced up and down the line handing out green leaves. The Sankaracharya was being carried in a palanquin, but I couldn't see him because the curtains were drawn. When I offered *kanji* to the people who were carrying him, they decided to stop and eat my offering. This caused the Sankaracharya to open the curtains to see what the delay was. I immediately prostrated to him.

He looked at me in silence for a few seconds and then said, 'After one mile I shall rest for a while. You can come and see me in that place.'

There was a small town called Vepur about a mile from the village. I discovered from one of his entourage that a *bhikshā* [food offering] had been arranged there and that the Sankaracharya would be staying in the Vepur Traveller's Bungalow.

There was a sub-inspector of police in our village who was quite a good devotee. When we heard that the Sankaracharya was staying nearby we both walked to Vepur to see him. A large crowd was milling around him when we arrived but I still managed to get near enough to touch his feet.

His brahmin attendants complained, saying, 'Non-brahmins should not touch him,' but the Sankaracharya silenced them by saying, 'He is a *brahmachāri* and a *sādhu* so it doesn't matter'.

*A brahmachāri is a celibate student who devotes himself to spiritual studies. Brahmacharya is one of the four traditional Hindu stages of life (called 'āśramas'). When the studies have been completed, the student generally moves onto the second stage of life—that of a married householder. Some serious spiritual seekers bypass this phase and remain celibate sādhus all their lives.*

*One of the primary functions of the Sankaracharyas is to uphold and enforce the traditional tenets of orthodox Hinduism. In the 1920s this would have entailed a strict adherence to the caste rules which maintained that physical contact between brahmins and lower castes and outcastes would result in spiritual pollution. Sādhus and sannyāsins are felt by many people to have removed themselves from the caste hierarchy, so the pollution rules would not apply to them.*

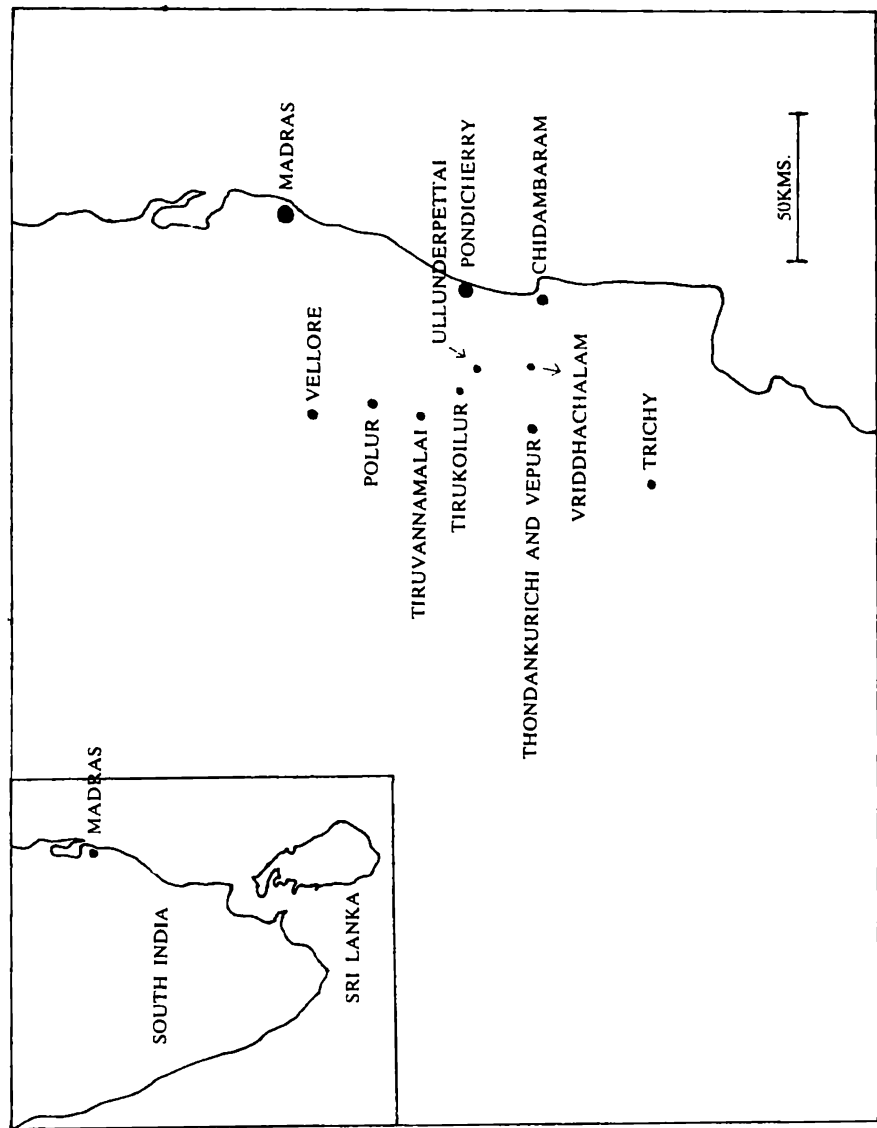
*Nowadays, the rules of inter-caste mingling and touching have largely fallen into disuse, although some traditional brahmins still practise them.*

Since the Sankaracharya seemed to be favourably inclined towards me, I asked him to initiate me and give me *upadēsa* [spiritual instruction]. He gave me the *mantra* 'Sivāya Namah' to repeat and also told me to write it one *lakh* [100,000] times. Having succeeded in my mission I returned to my village and began to follow his advice. I bought several notebooks and filled them with the *mantra*. After that I did *japa* [continuous repetition] of the *mantra* and also started to meditate on it.

Sometime in 1928, when I was twenty-one years old, a wandering *sādhu* passed through the village. He gave me a copy of *Upadēsa Undiyār* which contained a photo of Sri Ramana Maharshi. As soon as I saw that photo I had the feeling that this was my Guru. Simultaneously, an intense desire arose within me to go and see him.

*Upadēsa Undiyār is a thirty-verse philosophical poem written by Ramana Maharshi in Tamil. It was first published in 1927, about a year before Annamalai Swami got to see it. Upadēsa Sāram is Sri Ramana's Sanskrit rendering of the same work. Some of the English translations which appear under the title Upādēsa Sāram are actually translations of Upadēsa Undiyār, the original Tamil work.*

That night I had a dream in which I saw Ramana Maharshi walking from the lower slopes of Arunachala to the old hall. At the threshold of the old hall he washed his feet with the water that was in his water pot. I came near him, prostrated at his feet, and then went into a kind of swoon because the shock of having *darshan* was too much for me. As I was lying on the ground with my mouth open, Bhagavan poured water from his pot into my



mouth. I remember repeating the words 'Mahadeva, Mahadeva' [one of the names of Siva] as the water was being poured in. Bhagavan gazed at me for a few seconds before turning to go into the hall.

*The terms 'hall' and 'old hall' refer to the building in which Sri Ramana lived and taught between 1928 and the late 1940s. Bhagavan is a Sanskrit word meaning 'Lord'. Most devotees addressed Sri Ramana as 'Bhagavan'. They would also use this title when they referred to him in the third person.*

When I woke the next morning I decided that I should go immediately to Bhagavan and have his *darshan*. After informing my parents that I was planning to leave the village, I went to the Bhajan Math to say goodbye to all the people there. Several of them began to cry because they had a strong suspicion that I would not return. I asked for their permission to leave, received it, and left the village that evening. I never went back. Some of the devotees, realising that I had no funds to support myself, collected some money and gave it to me as a parting present.

I had decided to walk twenty-five miles to a nearby town called Ullunderpettai because I had heard that there was a train from there to Tiruvannamalai, the town where Ramana Maharshi lived. However, before I began my journey, a convoy of twelve bullock carts passed through the village on their way to Ullunderpettai. The devotees in the village talked to one of the cart drivers and arranged for me to get a ride in his cart. The journey took all night but I was much too excited to sleep. I spent the entire night sitting in the cart, thinking about Bhagavan.

In Ullunderpettai I shared my food with the cart drivers before boarding the train for Tiruvannamalai. I had originally intended to go straight there, but when one of the passengers informed me that the Sankaracharya was camping near one of the towns on the train route, I decided to see him first and get his blessings. I got down at Tirukoilur [fifteen miles south of Tiruvannamalai] and made my way to Pudupalayam, the village where the Sankaracharya was staying. I found the Sankaracharya, did *namaskāram* to him and told him that I had had his *darshan* in Vepur.

*A namaskāram is either a prostration or a gesture of respect in which one puts the palms of one's hands together with the thumbs*

*on the breastbone. Whenever the term occurs in this book it is used in the former sense.*

The Sankaracharya gazed at me for a few seconds.

Then, with a smile of recognition he said, 'Yes, I remember you'.

'I am on my way to see Ramana Bhagavan,' I told him. 'Please give me your blessings.'

The Sankaracharya seemed very pleased to hear the news. 'Very good!' he exclaimed.

He turned to one of his attendants and asked him to give me some food. After I had finished eating, the Sankaracharya put some *vibhūti* on a plate and put his palm on it to bless it. He then put half a coconut and eleven silver coins on the plate and presented it to me. I took the money, the *vibhūti* and the coconut before returning the plate to him. Feeling that I had now got the blessings which I had sought, I prostrated to him, left the village, and continued my journey to Tiruvannamalai.

On my arrival in Tiruvannamalai I was told that there was another great saint there called Seshadri Swami and that it would be very auspicious if I could have his *darshan* before proceeding to Sri Ramanasramam, the ashram where Ramana Maharshi lived.

*Seshadri Swami, like Ramana Maharshi, came to Arunachala in his youth and stayed there till his death. In his wanderings around the town of Tiruvannamalai he generally behaved in such an eccentric way that many people thought he was mad. However, he redeemed himself in the eyes of the local people by having an astonishing array of supernatural powers which he openly flaunted. Though some of his power was used in traditional ways such as performing miraculous cures, he was more inclined to display it in a bizarre and unpredictable fashion. For example, he would sometimes vandalise shops in the Tiruvannamalai bazaar as an act of blessing. Shop owners welcomed his destructive behaviour because they had found from experience that the damage would be more than paid for in the weeks that followed by either a vast increase in profits or by the repayment of long-forgotten loans.*

*When Ramana Maharshi came to Tiruvannamalai in 1896, Seshadri Swami was one of the first people to recognise his greatness. He tried to protect Bhagavan from unwanted disturbances and sometimes referred to him as his younger brother.*

*Bhagavan held Seshadri Swami in high esteem. After Annamalai Swami had told Bhagavan about his meeting with Seshadri Swami (which is described in the next few paragraphs of Annamalai Swami's account) Bhagavan commented, 'There is not a single place in this town that has not been visited by Seshadri Swami, but he was never caught in māyā [illusion]'.*

*Seshadri Swami died in January 1929, a few months after Annamalai Swami arrived in Tiruvannamalai. His samādhi, which still attracts large crowds, is about 400 metres from Sri Ramanasramam.*

*In his account of their meeting Annamalai Swami mentions that he met Seshadri Swami in a mandapam. A mandapam is a Hindu architectural structure, usually a hall supported by stone pillars. A mandapam always has a roof but the sides are generally open.*

Seshadri Swami did not stay in any particular place but I soon managed to locate him in a *mandapam* which was near the main temple. He was easy to find because there was a crowd of about 40–50 people outside the *mandapam* waiting for him to come out. He had apparently locked himself in. When I peeped in through one of the windows I saw him continuously circling one of the pillars inside. After doing this for about ten minutes, he came outside, sat on a rock, and crossed his legs. I had brought a laddu [a large spherical sweet] which I wanted to give him but I wasn't sure what to do with it. Seshadri Swami must have sensed my indecision because he looked at me and indicated by a gesture that I should place the laddu on the ground in front of him.

Seshadri Swami had obviously been chewing betel nut for some time.

*Betel is a hard, dark-red nut. Its juice is supposed to aid digestion. It is often eaten along with a lime-coated green leaf. In this combination it is known as 'pān'.*

A mixture of the red juice and his saliva was dribbling out of his mouth, soaking his beard, and dripping onto the ground. Seshadri Swami picked up my laddu, smeared it with the saliva-and-betel juice that was staining his beard, and threw it onto the nearby road. As it broke on the ground, the crowd raced towards it and collected the pieces as *prasād*. I also managed to collect and eat a piece.

*Anything which is offered to a deity or a holy man becomes prasāda when it is returned to the donor or distributed to the public. Food is the most common form of prasāda.*

A group of local people appeared to be angry with Seshadri Swami. He silenced them by tossing some stones in their direction. These stones, instead of following a normal trajectory, bobbed and danced around their heads like butterflies. The men he had thrown the stones at got afraid and ran away. They clearly didn't want to tangle with a man who possessed supernatural powers of this kind.

When I went back and stood before Seshadri Swami again, he started to shout at me in a very abusive way.

'This fool came to Tiruvannamalai! Stupid man! What did he come here for?'

He carried on in this vein for some time, implying that I was wasting my time coming to Tiruvannamalai. I thought that I must have committed a great sin to have a great saint insult me like this. I started to cry because I thought that I had been cursed.

Eventually a man called Manikka Swami, who was Seshadri Swami's attendant, came up to me and consoled me by saying, 'Your trip to Tiruvannamalai will be successful. You will get whatever you have come for. This is Seshadri Swami's way of blessing you. When he abuses people like this he is really blessing them.'

Manikka Swami then took me to a hotel which was owned by a devotee of Seshadri Swami.

He told the owner, 'Seshadri Swami has just showered his blessings on this man. Please give him a free meal.'

I was not feeling particularly hungry, but when the owner insisted I sat down and ate some of his food. When I had eaten enough to satisfy him I got up and walked the remaining distance to Sri Ramanasramam.

I arrived there at about 1 p.m. As I approached the hall, part of the dream I had had in my village repeated itself in real life. I saw Bhagavan walk down the hill, cross the ashram and pause outside the hall while he washed his feet with water from his *kamandalu* [water pot]. Then he went inside. I sprinkled some of this water on my head, drank a little, and then went inside to meet him. Bhagavan was sitting on his couch while an attendant called Madhava Swami dried his feet with a cloth. Madhava Swami went

out a few minutes later, leaving Bhagavan and me alone in the hall. I had bought a small packet of dried grapes and some sugar candy to give him. I placed them on a small table that was next to Bhagavan's sofa and prostrated to him. When I stood up I saw that Bhagavan was eating a little of my offering. As I watched him swallow, the thought came to me that my offering was going directly into Siva's stomach.

I sat down and Bhagavan gazed at me in silence for about 10–15 minutes. There was a great feeling of physical relief and relaxation while Bhagavan was looking at me. I felt a wonderful coolness pervade my body. It was like immersing myself in a cool pool after being outside in the hot sun.

I asked for permission to stay and this was readily granted. A small hut was given to me and for the first week I stayed there as a guest of the ashram. During those first few days I either gathered flowers for the ashram's *pūjās* or just sat with Bhagavan in his hall.

As the days passed I became more and more convinced that Bhagavan was my Guru. Feeling a strong urge to settle down in the ashram, I asked Chinnaśwami, Bhagavan's younger brother, if I could work in the ashram. Chinnaśwami granted my request and said that I could serve as Bhagavan's attendant. At that time Madhava Swami was doing the job by himself.

Chinnaśwami told me, 'Madhava Swami is the only attendant at the moment. Whenever he goes out of the hall or goes for a rest you should stay with Bhagavan and attend to all his needs.'

About ten days after my arrival I asked Bhagavan, 'How to avoid misery?'

This was the first spiritual question I ever asked him.

Bhagavan replied, 'Know and always hold on to the Self. Disregard the body and the mind. To identify with them is misery. Dive deep into the Heart, the source of being and peace, and establish yourself there.'

I then asked him how I could attain Self-realisation and he gave me a similar answer: 'If you give up identifying with the body and meditate on the Self, which you already are, you can attain Self-realisation.'

As I was pondering on these remarks Bhagavan surprised me by saying, 'I was waiting for you. I was wondering when you would come.'

As a newcomer I was still too afraid of him to follow this up by asking him how he knew, or how long he had been waiting. However, I was delighted to hear him speak like this because it seemed to indicate that it was my destiny to stay with him.

A few days later I asked another question: 'Scientists have invented and produced aircraft which can travel at great speeds in the sky. Why do you not make and give us a spiritual aircraft in which we can quickly and easily cross over the sea of *samsāra*?'

*Samsāra is the seemingly endless cycle of birth and death through different incarnations. It can also be taken to mean worldly illusion or entanglement in worldly affairs.*

'The path of self-enquiry,' replied Bhagavan, 'is the aircraft you need. It is direct, fast and easy to use. You are already travelling very quickly towards realisation. It is only because of your mind that it seems that there is no movement. In the old days, when people first rode on trains, some of them believed that the trees and the countryside were moving and that the train was standing still. It is the same with you now. Your mind is making you believe that you are not moving towards Self-realisation.'

*Philosophically, Bhagavan's teachings belong to an Indian school of thought which is known as Advaita Vēdānta. (He himself, though, would say that his teachings came from his own experience, rather than from anything he had heard or read.) Bhagavan and other advaita teachers teach that the Self (Ātman) or Brahman is the only existing reality and that all phenomena are indivisible manifestations or appearances within it. The ultimate aim of life, according to Bhagavan and other advaita teachers, is to transcend the illusion that one is an individual person who functions through a body and a mind in a world of separate, interacting objects. Once this has been achieved, one becomes aware of what one really is: immanent, formless consciousness. This final state of awareness, which is known as Self-realisation, can be achieved, in Bhagavan's view, by practising a technique he called self-enquiry.*

*This technique needs to be explained in some detail since it is mentioned several times in Annamalai Swami's narrative. The following explanation summarises both the practice and theory behind it. It is taken from No Mind—I am the Self, pp. 14–15.*

*It was Sri Ramana's basic thesis that the individual self is*

nothing more than a thought or an idea. He said that this thought, which he called the 'I'-thought, originates from a place called the Heart-centre, which he located on the right side of the chest in the human body. From there the 'I'-thought rises up to the brain and identifies itself with the body: 'I am this body.' It then creates the illusion that there is a mind or an individual-self which inhabits the body and which controls all its thoughts and actions. The 'I'-thought accomplishes this by identifying itself with all the thoughts and perceptions that go on in the body. For example, 'I' (that is the 'I'-thought) am doing this, 'I' am thinking this, 'I' am feeling happy, etc. Thus, the idea that one is an individual person is generated and sustained by the 'I'-thought and by its habit of constantly attaching itself to all the thoughts that arise. Sri Ramana maintained that one could reverse this process by depriving the 'I'-thought of all the thoughts and perceptions that it normally identifies with. Sri Ramana taught that this 'I'-thought is actually an unreal entity, and that it only appears to exist when it identifies itself with other thoughts. He said that if one can break the connection between the 'I'-thought and the thoughts it identifies with, then the 'I'-thought itself will subside and finally disappear. Sri Ramana suggested that this could be done by holding onto the 'I'-thought, that is, the inner feeling of 'I' or 'I am' and excluding all other thoughts. As an aid to keeping one's attention on this inner feeling of 'I', he recommended that one should constantly question oneself 'Who am I?' or 'Where does this "I" come from?' He said that if one can keep one's attention on this inner feeling of 'I', and if one can exclude all other thoughts, then the 'I'-thought will start to subside into the Heart-centre.

This, according to Sri Ramana, is as much as the devotee can do by himself. When the devotee has freed his mind of all thoughts except the 'I'-thought, the power of the Self pulls the 'I'-thought back into the Heart-centre and eventually destroys it so completely that it never rises again. This is the moment of Self-realisation. When this happens, the mind and the individual self (both of which Sri Ramana equated with the 'I'-thought) are destroyed for ever. Only the Ātman or the Self then remains.

*The following practical advice was written by Bhagavan himself in the 1920s. Taken from Be As You Are (1992 ed., p.56) it encapsulates his basic teachings on the subject. All new visitors were encouraged to read the essay (entitled Who am I?) that this extract is taken from. It was published as a pamphlet and Bhagavan encouraged the manager of the ashram to sell it cheaply in many languages so that all new people could have an affordable and authoritative summary of his practical teachings.*

*The mind will subside only by means of the enquiry 'Who am I?' The thought 'Who am I?', destroying all other thoughts, will itself be finally destroyed like the stick used for stirring the funeral pyre. If other thoughts arise one should, without attempting to complete them, enquire, 'To whom did they rise?' What does it matter how many thoughts rise? At the very moment that each thought rises, if one vigilantly enquires, 'To whom did this rise?', it will be known 'To me'. If one then enquires 'Who am I?', the mind will turn back to its source and the thought which had risen will also subside. By repeatedly practising thus, the power of the mind to abide in its source increases.*

In the years that followed I had many other spiritual talks with Bhagavan but his basic message never changed. It was always, 'Do self-enquiry, stop identifying with the body and try to be aware of the Self which is your real nature'.

Prior to these early conversations I had been spending several hours each day performing elaborate *pūjās* and *anushtānas*.

When I asked Bhagavan if I should continue with them he replied, 'You need not do any of these *pūjās* any more. If you practise self-enquiry, that alone will be enough.'

My duties as an attendant were fairly simple and I soon learned what to do. When devotees brought offerings I had to return some of them as *prasād*. I also had to ensure that the men sat on one side of the hall and the women on the other. When Bhagavan went out, one attendant would go with him while the other stayed behind to clean the hall. We had to keep the cloths that were on his sofa clean; we had to wash his clothes; in the early morning we had to heat water for his bath; and if he went for any walks during the day, one of us would always accompany him.

*Bhagavan's clothes consisted of kaupīnas and dhōtis. For most*

*of the time he only ever wore a kaupīna, a strip of cloth which covers the genitals and the centre of the buttocks. It was held in place by another strip of cloth which was tied around his waist. Occasionally, when it was cold, he would wrap a dhōti around himself. Dhōtis are strips of cloth which are usually worn like skirts. Bhagavan preferred to tie his in such a way that it extended from his armpits to his thighs.*

*When he arrived in Tiruvannamalai in 1896, Bhagavan threw away all his personal possessions, including his clothes. He never wore normal clothes again.*

Bhagavan would usually go for a short walk about three times a day. Sometimes he would go to Palakottu, an area adjacent to Sri Ramanasramam where some of his devotees lived, and sometimes he would walk on the lower slopes of Arunachala. He had stopped going for *giri pradakshina* in 1926, but he still occasionally went for a long walk.

*Walking around a person or an object in a clockwise direction as an act of veneration or worship is called pradakshina. Giri means hill or mountain. In this context giri pradakshina means walking around the mountain of Arunachala. There is an eight-mile road around the base of the mountain. Thousands of devotees regularly use this route to perform giri pradakshina.*

I remember going with him twice to the Samudram Lake, which is about a mile to the south-west of the ashram. We went once when it overflowed and once when the nearby pumping station was opened. I also once accompanied him to the forest near Kattu Siva Ashram, about two miles from the ashram. On that occasion Ganapati Muni came with us because Bhagavan wanted to show him a special tree which grew there. For that particular trip we slipped out of the ashram while everyone was having his after-lunch sleep. If we had been spotted, everyone in the ashram would have tried to come with us. Bhagavan always enjoyed his walks. He used to say that if he didn't walk on the hill at least once a day, his legs would get stiff and painful.

Bhagavan only slept about four to five hours every day. This meant long working hours for the attendants because one of us had to be on duty all the time he was awake. He never slept after lunch, whereas most of his devotees did. Bhagavan would often utilise this quiet time of the day to feed all the ashram's animals or

to tour the ashram in order to inspect any building works that were in progress.

Bhagavan would generally go to sleep at about 10 p.m. but he would usually wake up at about 1 a.m. and go out to urinate. When he returned he would often sit for half an hour or an hour before going back to sleep again. Then, sometime between 3 and 4 a.m., he would wake up and go to the kitchen to cut vegetables.

These night-time toilet trips became something of a ritual for both Bhagavan and the attendants. When he woke up the attendant had to take Bhagavan's *kamandalu*, fill it with hot water, and give it to him. The water was heated on a *kumutti* [charcoal brazier] which was always kept by the side of Bhagavan's couch. The attendant then had to give Bhagavan his stick and his torch, hold the door open for him, and follow him out into the night. Bhagavan usually went to a place where Muruganar's *samādhi* [grave and shrine] is now located because we had no proper toilets in those days. When he returned, the attendant had to clean Bhagavan's feet with a cloth.

Bhagavan would never wake his attendants up. It was their duty to be awake and ready at 1 a.m. One morning I failed to wake up because I had had a dream in which I woke up at 1 a.m. and performed all the duties I have just described. At the end of my dream I went back to sleep, satisfied that I had done my work. I was woken up sometime later by Bhagavan returning alone to the hall. I apologised for oversleeping and told Bhagavan that I had dreamt about doing all the usual services for him and had then gone back to sleep.

Bhagavan laughed and said, 'The services you did for the dream Swami are for me only'.

When I first came to the ashram there were still some leopards in the area. They rarely came into the ashram but at night they often frequented the place where Bhagavan used to urinate. I remember him meeting one on one of his nocturnal trips. He was not the least bit afraid. He just looked at the leopard and said, '*Pōdā!* [Go away!]'. And the leopard just walked away.

Soon after I came I was given a new name by Bhagavan. My original name had been Sellaperumal. One day Bhagavan casually mentioned that I reminded him of a man called Annamalai Swami who had been his attendant at Skandashram. He started to use this name as a nickname for me. When the devotees heard this they all

followed suit and within a few days my new identity was firmly established.

*Bhagavan lived at Skandashram, on the eastern slopes of Arunachala, from 1916–22. Annamalai Swami died there during a plague outbreak in 1922.*

When I had been an attendant for about two weeks the Collector from Vellore [the senior-most civil servant from the local district headquarters] came to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. He was called Ranganathan and he brought a large plate of sweets as an offering to Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked me to distribute the sweets to everyone in the ashram, including those who were not then present in the hall. While I was distributing the sweets to the people outside the hall, I went to a place where no one could see me and secretly helped myself to about double the quantity that I was serving to everyone else. When the distribution was completed I went back to the hall and put the plate underneath Bhagavan's sofa.

Bhagavan looked at me and said, 'Did you take twice as much as everyone else?'

I was shocked because I was sure that no one had seen me do it.

'I took it when no one was looking. How does Bhagavan know?'

Bhagavan made no answer. This incident made me realise that it is impossible to hide anything from Bhagavan. From that time on I automatically assumed that Bhagavan always knew what I was doing. This new knowledge made me more alert and more attentive to my work because I didn't want to commit any similar mistakes again.

It was also the attendants' job to protect Bhagavan from eccentric or misguided devotees. I remember one incident of this kind very clearly. A boy about twenty years of age appeared in the hall wearing only a loincloth. After announcing to everyone that he also was a *jnāni*, he went and sat on the sofa next to Bhagavan. Bhagavan made no comment about this, but very soon afterwards he got up and went out of the hall. While he was away I took the opportunity to eject this impostor. All of us in the hall were annoyed by his arrogance and his presumption, and I must admit that I handled him rather roughly while I was throwing him out. I

also forbade him from coming into the hall again. When peace had been finally restored Bhagavan came back into the hall and resumed his usual position on the sofa.

I was very happy to have found such a great Guru as Bhagavan. As soon as I saw him I felt that I was looking at God Himself. However, initially, I was not very impressed either by the ashram or by the devotees who had gathered around him. The management seemed to be very autocratic and most of the devotees didn't seem to have much interest in the spiritual life. So far as I could see, they were primarily interested in gossiping. These early impressions disturbed me.

I thought to myself: 'Bhagavan is very great. But if I live in the company of these people I may lose the devotion that I already have.'

I came to the conclusion that it would not be spiritually beneficial for me to associate with people who didn't seem to have much devotion. I know now that this was a very arrogant attitude, but those were my true feelings at the time. These thoughts disturbed me so much that for three or four nights I was unable to sleep. I finally came to the conclusion that I would keep Bhagavan as my Guru but live somewhere else.

I remember thinking: 'I will go and do meditation on the Self somewhere else. Without having the distracting friendship of any human beings, I will go to an unknown place and meditate on God. I will go for *bhikshā* [beg for food] and lead a solitary life.'

About three weeks after I first came to the ashram, I left to take up my new life. I told no one, not even Bhagavan, about my decision. I left at 1 a.m. on a full-moon night and started to walk towards town. I went straight through the town, past Easanya Math [a monastic institution on the north-east side of Tiruvannamalai] and started walking towards Polur. I had no particular destination in mind, I just wanted to get away from the ashram. I spent the whole night walking and reached Polur [twenty miles north of Tiruvannamalai] just after dawn. The walk had made me very hungry so I decided to go for *bhikshā* in the town. It was not a great success. I begged at about 500 different houses but no one gave me any food. One man told me that I should go back to Tiruvannamalai while another man, who was serving a meal when I approached him, shouted at me, telling me to go away. Eventually I gave up and walked to the outskirts of the town. I

found a well in a field and spent about half an hour standing in it, with the water up to my neck, hoping that the coldness of the water would take my hunger pains away. It didn't work. Then I made my way to the *samādhi* [shrine] of Vitthoba and sat there for a while.

*Vitthoba was an eccentric saint, rather like Seshadri Swami, who lived in Polur in the first decades of this century. He died a few years before Annamalai Swami went there.*

I finally got something to eat when an old lady came to do *pūjā*.

She looked at me and said, 'It seems as if you are very hungry. Your eyes are starting to sink into your face. I don't have much myself but I can give you some ragi [millet] gruel.'

As she was saying this she gave me about 1½ tumblers of the ragi gruel to drink. It didn't do much for my hunger pangs but I was still very happy to receive it.

The long walk and the lack of food had made me very tired. As I sat there I began to question the wisdom of leaving Bhagavan. It was clear that things had not turned out in the way that I had expected. This indicated to me that the decision might not have been correct. I formulated a plan which I thought would test whether my decision had been correct or not. I took a large handful of flowers, placed them on the *samādhi* of Vitthoba and started to remove them two at a time. I had decided in advance that if there were an odd number of flowers I would return to Bhagavan. If there were an even number I would carry on with my original plan. When the result indicated that I should go back to Bhagavan, I immediately accepted the decision and started walking towards Tiruvannamalai.

Once I had accepted that my *prārabdha* [destiny] was to stay with Bhagavan, my luck began to change. As I was walking into town a hotel owner invited me into his hotel and gave me a free meal and some money. He even prostrated to me. I had decided to return to Tiruvannamalai by train because I wanted to get back to Bhagavan as soon as possible, but before I could reach the station some more people invited me into their house and asked me to eat. I ate a little food there and then excused myself on the grounds that I had just eaten a big meal. I had decided to try to travel without a ticket, wrongly assuming that the money I had been given would not be enough for the journey. My good luck

continued on the train. Half way to Tiruvannamalai a ticket inspector came to inspect all the tickets. I seemed to be invisible to him, for I was the only person in the carriage who was not asked to produce a ticket.

A similar thing happened at the end of the journey. When I paused in front of the ticket collector on the station platform he said, 'You have already given your ticket. Go! You are holding the others up!' Thus, by Bhagavan's grace, I escaped on both occasions.

I walked the remaining distance to the ashram. On my arrival I went straight to Bhagavan, prostrated before him, and told him everything that had happened. Bhagavan then confirmed that it was my destiny to stay at Ramanasramam.

Looking at me he said, 'You have work to do here. If you try to leave without doing the jobs that are destined for you, where can you go?'

After saying this Bhagavan looked at me intently for a period of about fifteen minutes. As he was looking at me I heard a verse repeating itself inside me. It was so loud and clear it felt as if someone had implanted a radio there. I had not come across this verse before. I only discovered later that it was one of the verses from *Ulladu Nārapadu Anubandham* [one of Bhagavan's philosophical poems which deals with the nature of reality]. The verse says:

The supreme state which is praised and which is attained here in this life by clear self-enquiry, which rises in the Heart when association with a *sādhū* is gained, is impossible to attain by listening to preachers, by studying and learning the meaning of the scriptures, by virtuous deeds, or by any other means.

*Although the word 'sādhū' generally refers to someone who is pursuing a spiritual career full-time, in this context it means someone who has realised the Self.*

The meaning was very clear: staying near Bhagavan would be more beneficial for me than doing *sādhana* alone in some other place.

At the end of the fifteen minutes I did *namaskāram* to Bhagavan and said, 'I will do whatever work you order me to do,

but please also give me *mōksha* [liberation]. I do not want to become a slave to *māyā* [illusion].’

Bhagavan made no reply but I was not perturbed by his silence. Somehow, the mere asking of the question had made my mind peaceful. Bhagavan then asked me to go and eat some food. I replied that I was not hungry because I had recently eaten.

I added: ‘I don’t want food. All I want is *mōksha*, freedom from sorrow.’

This time Bhagavan looked at me, nodded, and said, ‘Yes, yes’.

*This verse from Ulladu Nārpadu Anubandham on the greatness of association with Self-realised beings is one of five on the subject which Bhagavan incorporated in the poem. He discovered the original Sanskrit verses on a piece of paper which had been used to wrap some sweets. He liked the ideas they conveyed so much he translated them into Tamil himself and put them at the beginning of Ulladu Nārpadu Anubandham. The other four verses are as follows:*

*By satsang [association with reality or, more commonly, with realised beings] the association with the objects of the world will be removed. When that worldly association is removed, the attachments or tendencies of the mind will be destroyed. Those who are devoid of mental attachment will perish in that which is motionless. Thus they attain jīvan mukti [liberation while still alive in the body]. Cherish their association.*

*If one gains association with sādhus, of what use are all the religious observances? When the excellent cool southern breeze itself is blowing, what is the use of holding a hand-fan?*

*Heat will be removed by the cool moon, poverty by the celestial wish-fulfilling tree, and sin by the Ganges. But know that all these, beginning with heat, will be removed merely by having the darshan [sight] of incomparable sādhus.*

*Sacred bathing places, which are composed of water, and images of deities, which are made of stone and earth, cannot be comparable to those great souls [mahātmās].*

*Ah, what a wonder! The bathing places and deities bestow purity of mind after countless days, whereas such purity is*

*instantly bestowed upon people as soon as sādhus see them with their eyes.*

*Several years after this incident Annamalai Swami asked Bhagavan about one of these verses:*

‘We know where the moon is, and we know where the Ganges is, but where is this wish-fulfilling tree?’

‘If I tell you where it is,’ replied Bhagavan, ‘will you be able to leave it?’

I was puzzled by this peculiar answer but I didn’t pursue the matter. A few minutes later I opened a copy of *Yōga Vāsishṭa* which was lying next to Bhagavan. On the first page I looked at I found a verse which said, ‘The *jnāni* is the wish-fulfilling tree’. I immediately understood Bhagavan’s strange answer to my question. Before I had a chance to tell Bhagavan about this, he looked at me and smiled. He seemed to know that I had found the right answer. I told Bhagavan about the verse but he made no comment. He just carried on smiling at me.

## Building Works—I

My work as an attendant only lasted about a month. At the end of that period Bhagavan decided that I would be better employed supervising construction jobs within the ashram. The first intimation that Bhagavan was planning this for me came while I was attending to my usual duties in the hall.

Bhagavan suddenly turned to me and said, 'A man is building a wall near the water tank. Go and see what he is doing.'

It seemed a rather vague kind of instruction but I carried it out as best I could. I watched the mason for a few minutes and then asked him what he was doing.

He replied, 'Ramaswami Pillai told me to construct a wall here, so I am constructing a wall'.

*In Indian English the term 'mason' is used to denote someone who builds with stones or bricks. It is not used to denote people who cut, carve or dress stone.*

I went back to the hall, told Bhagavan what the mason had said and gave him a brief report on how the work was progressing.

A few minutes later Bhagavan looked at me again and repeated his original instruction: 'Go and see what he is doing.'

Slightly perplexed, I went outside and again asked the mason what he was doing.

The mason replied, 'I have already told you, I am constructing a wall'.

Since I could see nothing wrong with the wall, or with the way he was constructing it, I could not understand why Bhagavan was so insistent that I check up on his activities. I went back to Bhagavan and gave him a further progress report.

A few minutes later Bhagavan repeated his instruction for the third time: 'Go and see what he is doing.'

Quite understandably, the 'mason was somewhat annoyed when I went back and asked for the third time what he was doing.

'Are you mad?' he said. 'I have already told you that I am constructing a wall. Can't you see for yourself what I am doing?'

I would not have been surprised to learn that he really did think that I was mad since it was quite clear to everyone that he

was building a wall in a reasonably competent manner. There was really no justification for my repeated queries. I felt obliged to ask them only because Bhagavan clearly wanted to know what was going on. For the third time I went back to the hall and told Bhagavan what the mason had said.

After remaining silent for a few minutes Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'From now on somebody else can take care of your work in the hall. Go and supervise this mason. Make sure that he does the job properly.'

My first reaction to this new assignment was: 'Why didn't Bhagavan give me this instruction in the beginning? Why did he make me go backwards and forwards three times before telling me what his real intention was?'

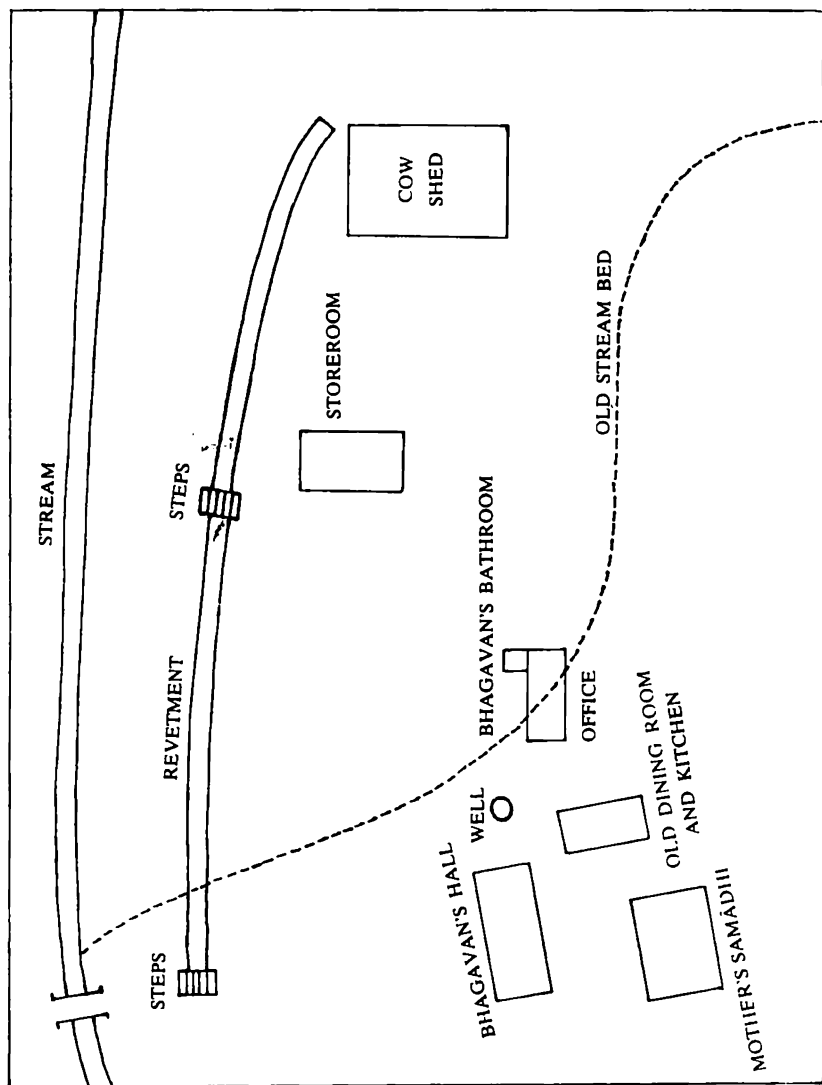
Later, I came to understand that Bhagavan was training me to understand his own method of supervision. Although he sometimes gave me detailed instructions, on many of the jobs that he gave me he would only give me the briefest hint of what he wanted to be done. I would then have to decide what Bhagavan really intended and execute the work accordingly.

This initial assignment took very little time. When it was completed Bhagavan told me that I should supervise the construction of a large wall of the north side of the ashram.

In the first few years of Sri Ramanasramam's existence, the stream which now runs behind the back wall used to flow through the middle of the ashram. Bhagavan asked me to build this wall to prevent the stream from entering the ashram so that we would be protected from the flood waters which poured off the hill during the rainy season. There was already a small bund made out of earth protecting the north side of the ashram but Bhagavan seemed to think that this would be insufficient to contain a heavy flood. As Bhagavan was outlining the work he told me about some of the problems which the ashram had had in the past.

'In our first years here,' said Bhagavan, 'after a heavy rain there would be a torrent of water 5-6 feet deep flowing through the channel which cuts across the ashram.'

*If one were to describe the location of this channel relative to the buildings that now exist in the ashram, one would say that after it went past the west side of the dining room, it veered to the east to flow through the rear portion of what is now Bhagavan's samādhi*



Sri Ramanasramam: Principal Buildings and Features 1928 -35.

*hall. It left the ashram near the bridge that is next to the Dakshina-murti shrine. The course is shown on the map on page 37.*

Bhagavan told me that he wanted to construct a huge earth-and-masonry wall, about 100 yards long, which would permanently divert the stream and make it flow into Agni Teertham, a large man-made reservoir about 300 yards to the east of the ashram.

I was told that the correct English term for such a construction is 'revetment'. Bhagavan himself used the word *rakshanai*, which means 'protection'. He told me several times that this revetment would protect the ashram against all future floods.

My instructions, given to me by Bhagavan himself, were to build two parallel walls, slightly inclined towards each other, out of stone. These walls were to be six feet high and eight feet apart at the top.

'As you build the walls,' advised Bhagavan, 'fill the space between them with mud. If you mix earth and water together and compress it, it will be very strong.'

As I was carrying out these instructions several groups of devotees came to watch. Because of the size and thickness of the wall, some of them began to joke that I was building a railway embankment. Some other people facetiously asked me if I were building a dam or a wall. All of them thought that I was wasting money (the ashram had very little in those days) by constructing such a big strong wall. I was unperturbed by their comments, their criticisms and their jokes because I knew that I was merely following Bhagavan's instructions.

One day, while I was working on this wall, the munsif [tax collector] of Tiruvannamalai came to watch me work.

After a few minutes he remarked, 'Why are you building such a big wall? Which fool gave you this plan?'

I didn't like to hear Bhagavan insulted in this way so I told him very angrily, 'Go to Chinnaswami's office and drink some coffee. Don't come here and interfere with my work. If you come and make statements like this again I will beat you with my sandals.'

I spoke like this because I had read somewhere a statement by Ramakrishna Paramahansa: 'If anyone insults your Guru, you should hit him.'

The munsif went to Chinnaswami and complained that I had

threatened him. Chinnaswami brought the munsif to me and demanded to know why I had spoken to him like this.

I told him, 'This man came up to me and said, "Which fool gave you this plan?" I am following Bhagavan's plan. Who is he to insult my Guru?'

Chinnaswami appeared to accept my explanation because he left with the munsif and didn't mention the matter again. I should explain my peculiar behaviour by saying that I was rather hot-headed in those days and very eager to protect Bhagavan's honour and good name.

When the work was nearly over I added two sets of stone steps, one at the western end and one in the middle, so that Bhagavan and the devotees could easily climb over the wall on their way to Arunachala.

Bhagavan's judgement and foresight were eventually vindicated. In the monsoon that followed the completion of the wall, the stream behind the ashram burst its banks. The resulting floodwater came three-quarters of the way up the wall. Fortunately, the wall was strong enough to withstand the pressure and to divert all the water away from the ashram.

After the wall had been completed Ramaswami Pillai filled in the old stream bed. In those days he did a lot of work levelling and terracing the ashram land. When Bhagavan first moved to Ramanasramam in 1922, the land was full of potholes and craters, largely because the local people used to take the soil from there and turn it into mud for their houses. Over the course of several years Ramaswami Pillai filled in all these craters and levelled the land. He was so enthusiastic about doing this that he would even work during the night.

The wall is no longer six feet high. A short time after it was completed, the ground on either side of the wall was raised and levelled. Nowadays, only about five feet of the original wall sticks out above the ground. As a final footnote to this story I should say that some of the devotees had a plan to build a compound wall along the top of the revetment. This idea had to be abandoned because we had no money to pay for it.

After the work on the wall was completed Bhagavan asked me to supervise the construction of the storeroom which is now opposite the kitchen door. Before I give an account of how this building and many others in the ashram came into existence, it

will be helpful to explain just how the ashram looked in those days.

When I first arrived in 1928 Bhagavan was living in the old hall. This building had only recently been completed. Prior to this, Bhagavan had lived for five or six years in a small room which was part of the building which covered the Mother's *samādhi*.

*Sri Ramanasramam grew up around the samādhi of Ramana Maharshi's mother. After she realised the Self at the moment of her death in 1922, her body was buried on the south side of Arunachala. Bhagavan moved from Skandashram to the shrine which had been constructed over the grave a few months later.*

*Chinnaswami took over the management of the ashram around the end of 1928. He had first come to live with Bhagavan during the period when Bhagavan was at Skandashram. He became a sannyāsin there and assumed the title of Niranjanananda Swami. Because he was Bhagavan's younger brother, most people called him by his nickname, Chinnaswami, which means 'Little Swami' or 'Younger Swami'.*

There is one other interesting story connected with the early days of the old hall. In the beginning there was no sofa there. Bhagavan just sat on a wooden bench in one corner of the room. Later, a man called Rangaswami Gounder brought a sofa and asked Bhagavan to sit on it. When Bhagavan refused, Rangaswami Gounder started to cry. For three successive days he was crying in the hall, begging Bhagavan to accept his gift. Finally, on the night of the third day, Bhagavan got off his bench and went to sleep on the sofa. From that day on he spent most of his time sitting or sleeping on this sofa.

There is another story, which is not generally known, about the building which covered the Mother's *samādhi*. Originally, the *lingam* had been covered with a small hut made out of coconut leaves.

*A lingam is a vertical cylinder of stone with a rounded upper end. It is a symbol of the unmanifest Siva and it is worshipped in all Siva temples. Lingams are often installed on the tombs (samādhis) of Saiva saints.*

Sometime in the mid-1920s a group of brick makers tried to bake some bricks near the ashram. When the bricks failed to fire

properly, the brick makers abandoned them. Bhagavan, unwilling to waste anything that was remotely useful, decided that the bricks could be used to build a wall around the Mother's *samādhi*. A few days later, in the middle of the night, Bhagavan and all the resident devotees arranged themselves in a line between the brick kiln and the *samādhi*. By passing bricks along the line they were able to transfer all of them to the ashram during the night. The next day a wall was built around the *samādhi*. Bhagavan himself did all the work on the inside of the wall while a professional mason worked on the outside. The new building was completed by erecting a thatched roof on top of the wall.

Between this building and the old hall, where Bhagavan's *samādhi* hall now stands, there was a long tiled building containing the original dining room and kitchen. Bhagavan used to have his morning bath in a corner of this building before his own bathroom was completed.

These three buildings—the Mother's *samādhi*, the old dining room and the old hall—were the only major structures that had been erected by 1928, the year of my arrival there. In addition to these there were some coconut-leaf huts, which were used to house resident devotees, and a few thatched sheds.

This was the state of the ashram when Bhagavan asked me to supervise the construction of the storeroom. Rangaswami Gounder, the man who had given the sofa, gave a donation to the ashram and asked that it be used for the construction of a cowshed. He also promised to donate some cows when the cowshed was finished. Chinnaśwami felt that a storeroom would be more useful to the ashram. He went ahead and constructed a building in the form of a cowshed, just to please Rangaswami Gounder, but as soon as it was finished he converted it into a storeroom. The conversion was only partial. Even today the metal rings which the cows should have been tied to are still hanging from the inside walls. Rangaswami Gounder was understandably annoyed at this change of plan. He came and abused Chinnaśwami in no uncertain terms, accusing him of wasting his money, but Chinnaśwami just kept quiet and absorbed it all.

This storeroom was my first big construction job. I was somewhat apprehensive about undertaking it because I had had no previous experience in constructing buildings. My father had been an outstanding builder but he had never taught me any of his skills.

Bhagavan, knowing that I was nervous because of my lack of experience, helped me to do the job. The workers suspected that initially I had no idea about building matters, but they were diplomatic enough to keep quiet about it. However, once I had absorbed a little knowledge from Bhagavan, I summoned up sufficient courage to draw up a few simple plans for the workers. There must have been some merit in them for when I began to explain them to the workers they began to have a more favourable opinion of me.

While the work was going on the masons and the women labourers were always gossiping about worldly matters. The head mason seemed to encourage their behaviour by joking with them in a very crude way. I had lived a fairly sheltered life till then and I found their behaviour rather shocking.

Eventually I went and told Bhagavan, 'I have to be near the masons and the women workers in order to supervise them, but they are always talking about worldly matters in a very vulgar way. My mind is getting a little disturbed by all their talk.'

Bhagavan nodded his head but made no reply. A little later I was pleased to discover that the head mason had been replaced by a man called Kuppuswami. He was a great improvement on his predecessor. He had read and studied *Kaivalya Navanītam* and *Ribhu Gītā* [Tamil texts on *advaita* philosophy] and he had also attended *Vēdānta* classes at Easanya Math. We got on very well together.

Bhagavan seemed to have a natural flair for building work which more than made up for his lack of experience. He always seemed to know how to make the right decision at the right time. For example, there were three very large arches inside the storeroom. The masons who had originally constructed them had done a bad job and cracks had appeared in the walls at the top of each arch. Bhagavan gave me detailed instructions on how to grout the cracks and how to insert keystones in the top of each arch to strengthen them. I don't know how he knew about such things. I am certain that he had never constructed a masonry arch before. These stone keystones are still visible because they protrude about 1½ inches on either side of the wall.

It was during the construction of the storeroom that I had my first clash with Chinnaswami. He had his own ideas about the building and he kept insisting that I carry them out. I had to refuse

because I had already received contradictory orders from Bhagavan. I could never make him understand that Bhagavan's orders must always take precedence over his. We had many quarrels about this because I never once agreed to follow his instructions. My intransigence caused Chinnaswami to get very angry with me because he felt that I was deliberately flouting his authority. I wasn't at all concerned by his disapproval. I stuck to my guns because I knew that it was improper to go against the will of Bhagavan. Although I did not know it at the time, we were destined to have similar quarrels about almost every building that I constructed.

Occasionally, while I was still learning what to do, I got very frustrated. There were many difficult problems to overcome. Also, it was midsummer, there was no shade, and the heat was often unbearable.

Several times the thought came to me: 'Why is Bhagavan giving me all this trouble, making me work like this under the direct rays of the summer sun?'

Once, while such thoughts were passing through my mind, Bhagavan came to see what progress I had made.

Detecting the mood I was in, he said, 'I thought that if I told you to do a job you would be ready and willing to do it. I assumed that you were capable of doing it. If you can't do it, or find it difficult, just leave it.'

Bhagavan was giving me an opportunity to admit defeat but I refused to take it. For a few minutes prior to Bhagavan's arrival I had been thinking mutinous thoughts. Now, hearing Bhagavan's words, a great determination arose within me.

'Even if this whole body is destroyed in Bhagavan's service,' I thought, 'I will stand by his words and do whatever he asks of me.' I told Bhagavan that I was willing to carry on.

When the storeroom had been completed Bhagavan asked me to make a bas-relief of Arunachala over the entrance. He wanted it to be made out of lime plaster. He had already taught me how to make lime properly but I had no idea how to sculpt it into a three-dimensional picture.

'I don't know how to start making a figure like this,' I told Bhagavan. 'What do I do?'

Bhagavan took a piece of paper and drew a picture of Arunachala on it. Apart from the summit there were three lower

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Bhagavan took a piece of paper and drew a picture of Arunachala on it. Apart from the summit there were three lower

peaks outlined against the sky. As he was completing the picture he told me that the main peak represented Siva while the three subsidiary ones represented Ambal, Vinayaka and Subramania. Bhagavan gave me this picture and told me to make a figure out of lime that corresponded to it.

*Ambal is another name for Parvati, Siva's consort; Vinayaka (also known as Ganapati) and Subramania are Siva's sons. The mountain of Arunachala is traditionally held to be a manifestation of Siva.*

'But Bhagavan,' I said, 'I have no idea how to mould lime into shapes like this. How do I do it?' This time Bhagavan refused to give me any hints.

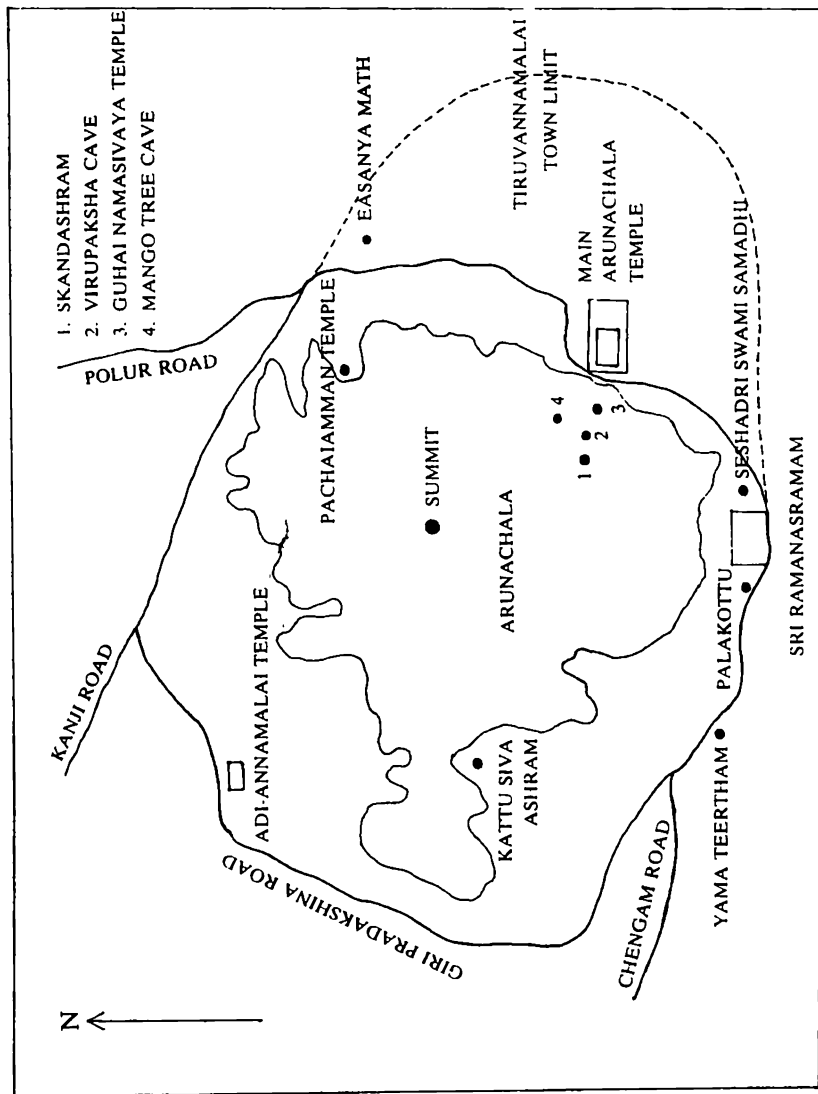
'This is Annamalai,' he said. 'You are also Annamalai. You should know how to do it without my telling you.'

*Annamalai is one of the Tamil names for Arunachala. It means 'unreachable or unapproachable mountain'.*

I accepted the commission and set about trying to execute it. I had grave misgivings about my ability to do it properly, but since Bhagavan had instructed me to do it, I couldn't refuse the job. I erected some scaffolding so that I could sit in front of the wall. For three days I sat there, playing with the lime, trying to make something that looked like Arunachala. I failed in all my attempts.

My determination to succeed, unfortunately, was not sufficient to compensate for my lack of skill and experience. In the middle of the third day Bhagavan, seeing that I was making no progress, climbed up the ladder and sat down next to me. He explained how the work should be done, demonstrating the correct technique with a few pieces of lime. After listening to Bhagavan and watching him work for a few minutes I suddenly understood how the whole work should be done. When Bhagavan had satisfied himself that I had mastered the technique he let me finish the job by myself. I completed the whole work before the end of that third day. The next day, following Bhagavan's instructions, I made another identical bas-relief over the inside of the entrance door. Both of these figures are still there. I have been told that nowadays they are painted blue so that they stand out from the neighbouring white-washed walls.

I was surprised how easily I acquired all the necessary skills to



Arunachala, the *giri pradakshina* road, and the principal places mentioned in the text.

supervise construction work. Most of the resident devotees were also surprised at how quickly I learned. Tenamma Patti, one of the ashram cooks, once asked Bhagavan about this.

‘Annamalai Swami has a lot of devotion towards Bhagavan,’ she said. ‘That is easy to understand. But he has also become an expert in building construction, apparently without any study or training. How is this possible?’

Bhagavan surprised her by saying, ‘He was an engineer in his last life’.

From various hints and veiled comments that he made it was clear that Bhagavan was aware of the previous lives of at least some of his devotees. Usually he kept this knowledge to himself. It was very unusual for him to make an explicit statement like this, a statement that indicated precisely what a devotee had been in his previous life.

My next big assignment was supervising the construction of the cowshed. Chinnaswami had made an arrangement with a local mason to build a small cowshed that would cost not more than Rs. 500. Chinnaswami felt that a small cowshed would be sufficient because at that time Lakshmi was the only cow in the ashram. Bhagavan wanted a bigger cowshed but for some reason he decided not to tell Chinnaswami.

At about 10 a.m. one morning, before the construction began, Chinnaswami organised a small *muhūrtam* [inauguration ceremony] on the site of his small cowshed. After everyone had left Bhagavan took me aside and told me that the plan must be changed.

‘Many cows will come here in the next few years,’ he said. ‘Even if we build a big cowshed, there will be so many cows that some of them will have to be kept outside. We must make a larger cowshed and you, rather than this mason, must supervise its construction.’

He took me to the corner of the ashram where the cowshed now stands and showed me where I should build it by marking lines on the ground. We didn’t measure the length of the lines but Bhagavan told me that he wanted all four walls to be forty-eight feet long.

When he was satisfied that I had understood what to do he added a peculiar provision: ‘If Chinnaswami comes and argues

with you about this plan, don't tell him that I asked you to work like this. Pretend that you are doing it on your own authority.'

I never asked Bhagavan why he wanted his role in this affair to be kept secret. To this day it remains a complete mystery to me.

I immediately engaged some workers to dig the trenches for the foundations. Chinnaswami had gone back to the office so we were able to start work on the new plan without his knowledge. At about 1 p.m., when the work was well underway, he decided to come and see what progress we were making.

His initial response was mute shock, but after he had assimilated the implications of what I was doing, he turned to me and asked in a rather sarcastic way: 'Oh, you have changed the plan. It is now a very big plan. Who gave you authority to do all this?'

I replied that I was doing it on my own authority. Chinnaswami ordered me to revert to the original plan but I refused. I told him that a bigger cowshed was needed and that I intended to carry on with my plan.

Chinnaswami understandably got very angry when I refused to obey him.

'Why did you change the plan without consulting me?' he demanded. 'I am the *sarvādhikārī* [supreme ruler] of this ashram.'

When I refused to back down he shouted at me and abused me, but none of his words or threats persuaded me to follow his orders. His final words were uttered more out of frustration than anger.

'I am starting to develop the ashram. How can I do it if you don't obey my instructions? You be the *sarvādhikārī*. I will go somewhere else.'

When Chinnaswami finally realised that I was not going to change my mind, he walked away and sat on a rock outside the ashram gate. It was a very perplexing situation for him. He had had no previous experience of workers disobeying him in such a flagrant manner. Some devotees came and told me that he spent a long time by the gate immersed in his anger. I went back to supervising the work so my account of what happened next comes from the eye-witness reports of other devotees.

Chinnaswami sat outside the gate for several hours uttering critical remarks about me to anyone who would listen.

'I am going to leave the ashram,' he repeatedly complained, 'because this man is going against all my plans. Let him take care

of the ashram. I will go and live in Chengam [a town about fifteen miles away] or some other place.'

Three devotees—T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, Ramakrishna Swami and Munagala Venkataramiah—went to Chinnaswami to find out what had made him so angry.

Chinnaswami told them, 'I am leaving the ashram because Annamalai Swami is going against all my plans. Let me go somewhere else. I will only come back if Annamalai Swami is thrown out of the ashram.'

These three devotees went to Bhagavan and told him, 'Chinnaswami is very angry. He wants to leave the ashram. He says he will only return if Annamalai Swami is thrown out.'

Bhagavan normally never interfered when Chinnaswami dismissed workers or asked devotees to leave the ashram, but on this occasion he backed me up by saying, 'If Annamalai Swami goes away, I will also go away'.

Chinnaswami withdrew his threat to leave the ashram and accepted the fact that I had to remain there, but he still continued to oppose 'my' plan for the cowshed. That evening Chinnaswami brought all the resident devotees to the hall and initiated a discussion about the relative merits of his plan and mine. Bhagavan took no part in this discussion. He just sat and listened to it. All the devotees who spoke favoured the small cowshed. I was the only person who favoured the large one but I kept quiet during all the discussions. When everyone had had his say, Chinnaswami brought the discussion to a close.

'Now let us all vote,' he said. 'Is it better to follow my plan or Annamalai Swami's plan?'

Everybody voted for Chinnaswami's plan, primarily, I suspect, because they were afraid of him. I didn't vote at all.

Bhagavan noticed my abstention and enquired, 'What is your opinion?'

I told him, 'I think that we should build a very big cowshed on the foundations that I started this morning'.

Bhagavan didn't give the slightest hint as to which side he favoured. When one of the devotees had suggested during the debate that I might be carrying out a plan which had secretly been given to me by Bhagavan, Bhagavan had neither confirmed nor denied the idea. He remained neutral right to the end.

After I had given my opinion on the matter Bhagavan re-

marked, 'Now it seems that the people here are divided into two parties. Let us see which of the two plans finally materialises.'

This was his last word on the matter. After speaking he got up and left the hall.

Although the outcome of the debate was inconclusive, Bhagavan had given me a little room to manoeuvre in. By refusing to allow Chinnaswami to sack me, and by refusing to endorse Chinnaswami's plan, it seemed to me that he had tacitly approved of the big cowshed. Acting on this assumption I continued to dig the trenches for the foundation. Chinnaswami didn't try to stop me, but he did subject me to a constant barrage of complaints, mostly about the cost of the project.

It was a very unusual situation for Chinnaswami. He was accustomed to exercising absolute power, so Bhagavan's intervention on my behalf was thus something quite extraordinary. The implications of this unusual response were not lost on Chinnaswami. He came to the conclusion, quite rightly, that there must have been some secret agreement between Bhagavan and me about the plan for the cowshed. This was the only solution which explained the two unusual events: my own insubordination and Bhagavan's intervention on my behalf.

Chinnaswami was unable to confirm his theory. He was far too scared to approach Bhagavan directly because Bhagavan would usually dismiss him with a curt '*Pōdā!*' [Go away!] if he started to make any complaints in the hall. Nor could he get any confirmation from me. I stuck by Bhagavan's words and insisted to everyone who asked me that the plan was wholly my idea.

On the evening of the third day I went to Chinnaswami to get the wages for the workers. Usually I would give him a list containing the amount that should be paid to each worker.

That evening, before I had a chance to hand over the list, he got very angry with me and shouted, 'We have got no money! We cannot pay the workers today because you have changed the plan! How can we possibly pay for a building of this size?'

Then, without even bothering to check the list, he threw the coin bag which contained the wages in my direction. He put a lot of violence and pent-up anger into this final gesture. Fortunately for me his aim was not good. The bag missed my head by a couple of inches.

This was the last straw for me. I went straight to Bhagavan and

told him that Chinnaswami had thrown this coin bag at me. Bhagavan listened to my account and then kept silent for a while. Although I had been following his instructions, he disapproved of devotees who brought complaints to him. Finally, he spoke to me. He gave me a long list of things, including food, which he said he didn't need. Without directly saying so, he implied that if the money had not been wasted on all these unnecessary items, the ashram would have enough money to construct the cowshed. A few minutes later Madhava Swami tried to apply some *jambak* [pain balm] to Bhagavan's legs.

Bhagavan reacted angrily: 'I don't need things like *jambak*. These are all unnecessary expenditures. I don't want or need things like this.' Shortly afterwards Bhagavan refused betel nut for the same reason.

The devotees who were present in the hall observed all these exchanges. When it became clear to them that the ashram did not have enough money to pay the workers who had been engaged that day, everyone in the hall contributed some money to make up the deficit. The amount collected proved to be sufficient to pay the workers that day and to hire them for the two succeeding days.

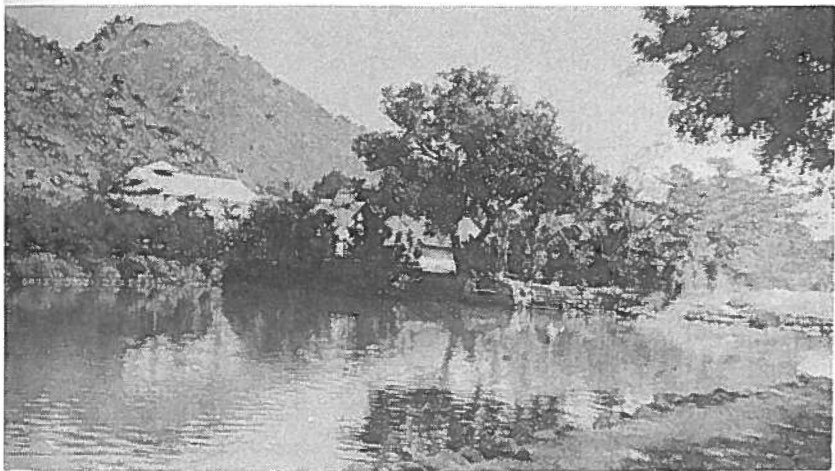
On the day that this money was due to run out, funds for Bhagavan's cowshed appeared under almost miraculous circumstances. Several weeks before, the editor of *The Sunday Times*, a Madras newspaper, had come for Bhagavan's *darshan*. He had been sufficiently impressed to write and publish a long complimentary article about Bhagavan. This article came to the attention of a prince in North India. The prince was also impressed by Bhagavan but at the time he did nothing about it. A few weeks later this prince decided to go on a tiger hunt in one of his forests. He managed to track down a tiger but when he raised his rifle to shoot it he was paralysed by a sudden and unexpected wave of fear. There was a strong awareness in him that if he didn't shoot, the tiger would pounce on him and kill him, but even so his paralysed muscles were unable to take any action.

Suddenly he remembered the article about Bhagavan and started to utter a prayer to him: 'If I am successful in this hunt, I will not only send you a Rs. 1,000 money order, I will also send you the head and the skin of the tiger.'

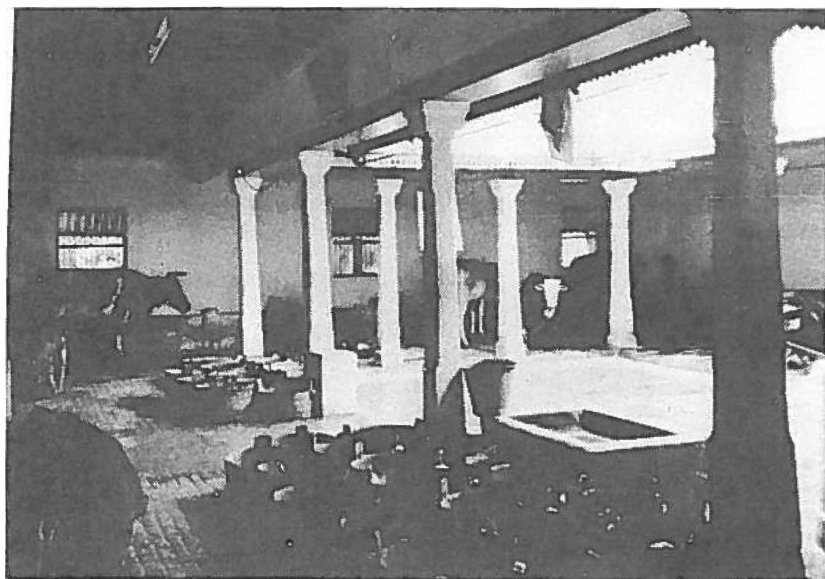
*Rs. is an abbreviation of rupee, the unit of Indian currency. The current exchange rate is about thirty-one to the dollar. The pur-*



Ramanasramam in the late 1920s: the tiled building on the right is Bhagavan's hall. The two thatched buildings in the centre, parallel to each other and ninety degrees to the hall, are the dining room and the kitchen. On the left, parallel to the hall, is the thatched building over the *samādhi* of Bhagavan's mother.



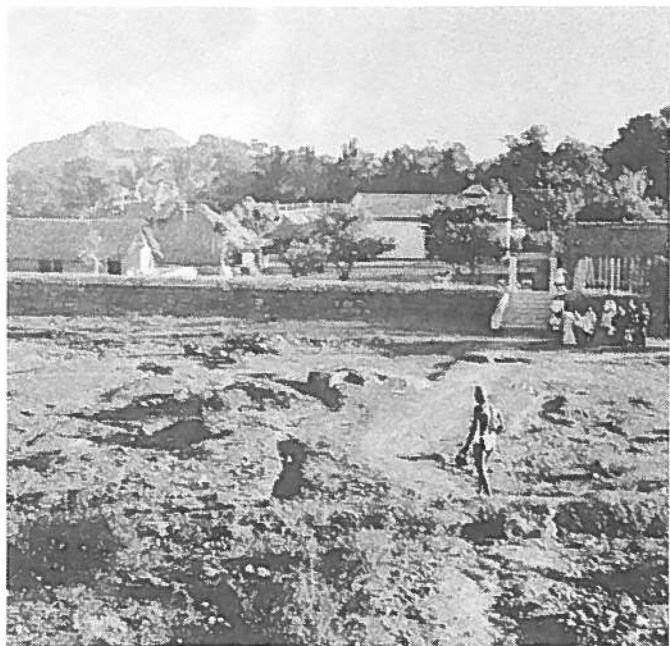
The ashram viewed across Pali Teertham. On the left is Bhagavan's hall, in the centre is the kitchen, and on the right, the Mother's *samādhi*.



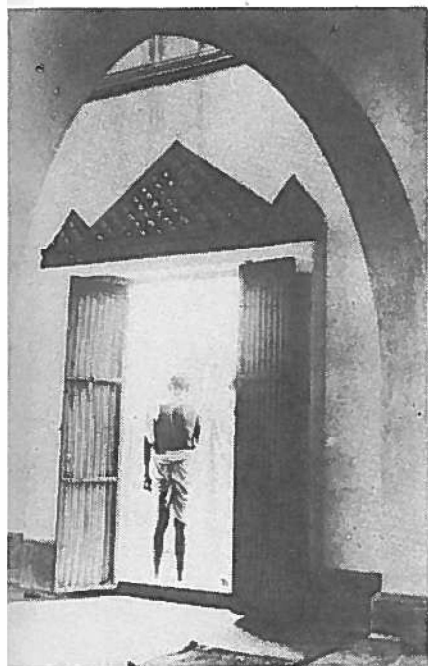
Inside the cowshed: a modern view. In the 1930s there were far fewer cows.



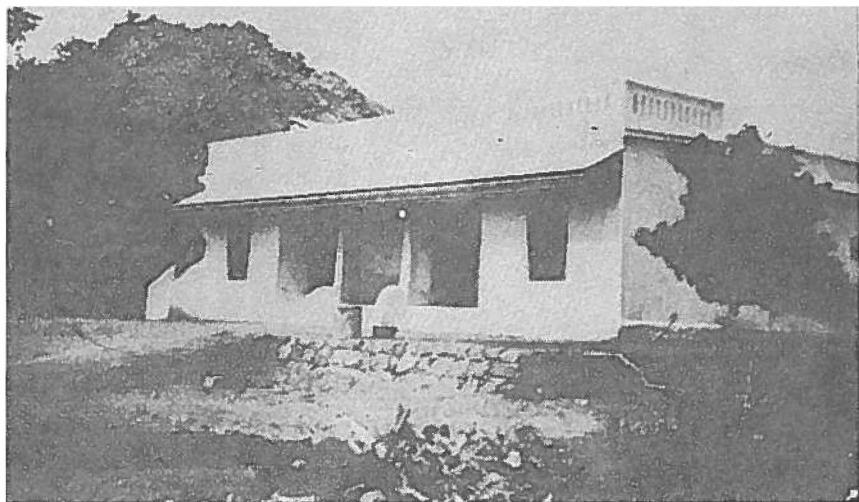
Annamalai Swami standing behind Bhagavan with folded arms. Chinnaswami is sitting in the front row on the right.



Above: Returning from a walk on the hill, Bhagavan approaches the revetment constructed by Annamalai Swami.



Left: The bas-relief of Arunachala over the inside of the storeroom. The arch in the foreground is the one repaired by Bhagavan and Annamalai Swami.



Above: the cowshed. Below: the office and bookstore. Both pictures were taken shortly after the construction work finished. '



*chasing power of the rupee was, of course, far higher at the time of this story. In those days unskilled labourers received about a quarter of a rupee per day—enough to supply all the basic necessities of life.*

The paralysis left him as soon as the prayer had been uttered, and he killed the tiger with his first shot.

The prince kept his promise. Two days after all the quarrels about the cowshed, the postman appeared with the Rs. 1,000. By a strange quirk of fate he gave the money to me rather than to Chinnaswami.

I took it to Bhagavan who remarked in a most casual way, 'Yes, I have been expecting this money order. Take it to Chinnaswami in the office.'

When I handed over the money to Chinnaswami he immediately forgot our dispute and gave me a big smile. The promised tiger skin arrived about a week later. Bhagavan sat on it for a few minutes while a local photographer took a few pictures of him.

Later Chinnaswami told me, 'You got your courage because Bhagavan told you to execute this plan. Bhagavan is not telling his plans to me at the moment, nor do you seem willing to tell me what they are. That is the only difficulty I have with you. It is inevitable that there will be little quarrels and fights in such circumstances. I am only trying to do my job, so please don't be angry with me.'

I used the money to buy cement, wood and iron for the cowshed. After four days, when all the money had been spent, Chinnaswami again started to complain to me about the escalating cost of the construction. A visiting devotee who overheard us wanted to know what the cause of our dispute was. I told him that Chinnaswami was criticising me for planning a big cowshed when there was no money available to pay for it.

The devotee, who had come from Madras to see Bhagavan, said, 'What else do you need? Maybe I can help you.'

I told him that our most urgent need was 4–5 tons of teakwood. I knew that this would cost a lot of money but the devotee was undismayed.

'No problem,' he said, 'I can easily send that amount from Madras.'

Chinnaswami was delighted to hear this because he knew that this wood would be a major component of the final bill. He told

the devotee that the wood was required urgently and requested him to go at once to Madras to make all the arrangements. The devotee seemed to be impressed by Chinnaswami's sense of urgency. He went to the hall, had Bhagavan's *darshan*, and then returned to Madras to attend to our business.

The teakwood arrived a few days later in a railway wagon. Along with it there came an unexpected bill for Rs. 3,000. When the devotee had offered to send the wood we had all naturally assumed that he had intended it to be a donation to the ashram. Chinnaswami almost exploded when he saw the bill because the amount owed was far more than all the money we possessed at that time. Fortunately, some of the richer devotees heard of our plight. They all got together, raised the money and paid the bill. If the teakwood and the bill had not arrived at the ashram it would not have occurred to them to donate the money.

Our finances were always in a precarious position when we were constructing the large buildings in the ashram. Fortunately, because the buildings were erected at the behest of Bhagavan, we never experienced any real financial disasters. While the work was going on, enough donations would come to cover all the costs. If no building works were in progress, no donations would come. In all the years that I was supervising the construction of Bhagavan's building plans there was never a day when a lack of money prevented us from working. Chinnaswami eventually came to realise that if a project had Bhagavan's blessing there was no need to worry about money.

As the cowshed was nearing completion he came up to me and said, 'This building will be a success because of Bhagavan's plan. It is only because of his grace that we have been able to finance it. Now I believe you.'

Bhagavan often came to the cowshed to give instructions and to see what progress had been made. He even used to visit the site during the night.

Once, as we were supervising the work together, Bhagavan told me, 'If you build this cowshed for Lakshmi, we will get all the necessary *punya* [merit accumulated from performing virtuous acts] to build a bookstore, a dining room and a shrine for the Mother. All this will happen in due course. This area will eventually become a town.'

Lakshmi herself often came to see how we were progressing

with her new home. If Bhagavan were there he would often pat her on the head and say, 'You must wait for a few more days. The work isn't finished yet.'

In those days Lakshmi could wander wherever she wished. Sometimes someone would take her to graze near the Samudram Lake, but mostly she stayed in the ashram.

During the last stages of construction Bhagavan came and told me that it would be a good idea to install a stone mortar and pestle so that a mash of cottonseed could be prepared for the cows. He even told me where to install it. When I mentioned to Chinna-swami that I planned to install this grinding stone, he rather petulantly insisted that I change its location and put it in a different corner of the cowshed. As soon as he left I ignored his orders and put it in the place where Bhagavan had indicated. Bhagavan saved me from another pointless quarrel by following Chinna-swami to the cowshed on his next visit.

Before Chinna-swami had a chance to complain, Bhagavan appeared and said, 'Ask Chinna-swami, which plan is better, his plan or your plan?'

Bhagavan had not said that the idea was his but Chinna-swami correctly interpreted this pointed remark to mean that Bhagavan himself had given me this job. Chinna-swami took the hint and agreed that my idea should be adopted.

Bhagavan knew that Chinna-swami was causing me a lot of trouble but he discouraged me from making any complaints. Apart from the incident of the coin bag, I only ever complained to him twice about Chinna-swami's behaviour. On both occasions Bhagavan reprimanded me for bringing the complaint to him. In one of the incidents Chinna-swami asked me to throw some stones at a dog and chase it away from the ashram.

I didn't want to punish a harmless dog so I went to Bhagavan and told him, 'Chinna-swami is asking me to throw stones at this innocent dog'.

Bhagavan surprised me by backing up his brother: 'If you cook some food and keep it in your house, and a dog comes near, are you not entitled to chase it away before it steals the food?'

Bhagavan was always very kind to animals. If he had seen a devotee throwing stones at a harmless dog he would probably have rebuked him. He gave this reply to me merely to show that he disapproved of devotees bringing complaints to him.

When devotees did bring complaints to him, he would generally criticise them for doing so. This did not mean that he approved of the action of whoever had caused the complaint. It merely meant that he disapproved of devotees who found fault with other people.

I cannot remember what my third and final complaint was but Bhagavan's reply on that occasion clearly showed his attitude towards complaints and complainers.

He began by saying, 'In practical matters it is inevitable that some differences will arise. Don't get disturbed by them.'

Then he asked me, 'What did you come to this ashram for?'

'I have read,' I replied, 'in a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that if the mind is pure, it becomes the Self. I want to keep my mind clean so that I can realise the Self. I have come here only for this purpose.'

'Isn't seeing the defects of others feeding the mind?' asked Bhagavan.

I accepted Bhagavan's criticism and told him that in future I would try not to see defects in other people.

As a final act of contrition I prostrated to Bhagavan and told him, 'From now on I shall not complain about anyone again'.

I kept my word: in all the succeeding years I never once took a complaint to Bhagavan about another devotee.

Though Bhagavan generally disliked hearing complaints, I can remember one incident in which he displayed an astonishing degree of tolerance towards a complaining visitor. It took place several years later when Bhagavan and I were walking towards the back gate of the ashram. Lunch had just finished and we were about to go on a walk to Palakottu. A wandering *sādhū* who had recently arrived approached Bhagavan with his complaints about the ashram.

'Your *sishtyas* [disciples] are just like the Guru. I came to your ashram and asked for some food but no one would give me any. Swami Vivekananda has talked a lot about *anna dāna* [giving food to travellers or pilgrims] and praised it. He talked a lot about *Vēdānta* and *Siddhānta* [philosophy] but he also stressed the importance of *anna dāna*.'

As I listened to all these complaints against both Bhagavan and the ashram I got more and more angry.

Eventually I interrupted him and told him, 'Why are you disturbing Bhagavan like this? Go away!'

Bhagavan silenced me with an angry look and permitted the *sādhū* to carry on with his complaints. The *sādhū*, realising that he was not going to be interrupted or sent away, lectured Bhagavan for about half an hour on the defects of the ashram and the people who worked there. When he finally stopped, having run out of complaints, Bhagavan very quietly and politely asked him if there was anything else he wished to tell him. The *sādhū* made no response.

Then Bhagavan said, 'I am not getting food here for nothing. Every day I cut vegetables, I look after the cows, I give *darshan* to the devotees and answer all their doubts and questions. That is why they are giving me food.'

Bhagavan then seemed to relent a little. He turned to me and said, 'What to do? Take him to the kitchen and give him some food.'

The *sādhū* ate his meal, left the ashram and never came back.

Chinnaswami's managerial style alienated a lot of devotees but as a matter of principle Bhagavan nearly always supported him if he got into any disputes with devotees. I remember one incident which illustrates this very well. A woman once came to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. Because she was a very shy woman who didn't like eating in the company of men, she ate alone in a separate hut near the dining room. Instead of sending some woman devotee like Sampurnammal to serve food to her, Chinnaswami himself decided to deliver her food and serve it to her.

When Bhagavan discovered what was happening he publicly rebuked him: 'Why don't you send one of the women to serve her? Why are you taking her food? She is very shy. She is not accustomed to dealing with strange men.'

Several devotees who had witnessed this scene began to think: 'If Bhagavan treats Chinnaswami like this, why should we treat him with any respect?'

In the succeeding days these devotees began to treat Chinnaswami rather badly. Bhagavan observed this in silence for a few days.

When he saw that the disgruntled devotees were not going to

change their attitude unless he intervened, he restored the *status quo* by telling them, 'Do you think that Chinnaswami is a *killuk-kīrai* [a small plant which can easily be pulled out of the ground with one's fingernails and thrown away]? Chinnaswami is the *sarvādhikārī* here. You should respect his position and follow his instructions.'

When the work on the cowshed was finally over Chinnaswami wrote to Rangaswami Gounder, the man who had given money for the cowshed which had been turned into a storeroom.

'We have completed a big cowshed. You can come and see for yourself. Please don't be angry with us anymore.'

Rangaswami Gounder accepted the invitation and was delighted to see what a big cowshed we had built. He kept his original promise and donated several cows to the ashram.

As he was being shown around the cowshed he remarked, 'When I saw that Chinnaswami had spent my earlier donation on a storeroom instead of a cowshed, I quite naturally got angry with him. I thought that he had wasted all my money. Now that this new cowshed, which is much bigger than the one I had planned, has been built, I am happy and content. Everything has turned out well in the end.'

Chinnaswami was also a happy man. In the closing stages of the work the ashram had received so many donations for the cowshed that there was a lot of money to spare when the work was finally completed. This put Chinnaswami into an unusually exuberant mood.

'Whenever you work for the ashram in future,' he told me, 'get the work done by throwing money wherever it is needed. Bhagavan will provide whatever is needed.'

Since the ashram now had a lot of spare cash, Chinnaswami, after getting Bhagavan's permission, decided to start several other building projects.

He came up to me and said, 'I am going to Burma for a few weeks in order to buy enough teakwood to build a big dining room and kitchen here. While I am away you should start work on a bathroom for Bhagavan, an office and a bookstore. I am confident that you will do a good job because I know from past experience that you will work according to the plans of Bhagavan.'

The Maharaja of Mysore had already given a donation for

Bhagavan's bathroom so I was able to start on that work almost immediately.

The work on all these new projects went very smoothly and I was able to complete them all without any untoward incidents. I should say, for the benefit of devotees who have visited the ashram, that the building which now contains the ashram office and bookstore was constructed after Bhagavan's death. The old office and bookstore, which were used for the remainder of Bhagavan's life, were located in the buildings which are now attached to the north-eastern corner of Bhagavan's *samādhi* hall. They are now used to store and despatch the ashram's publications. Bhagavan's bathroom is the small room which is attached to the north side of the old office [see the map on page 45]. It has a small door which faces the mountain.

While Chinnaswami was away in Burma I was entrusted with the job of paying the wages to the workers. Although I had taught myself to read in order to study the scriptures, I had never bothered to teach myself basic arithmetic. Because of this I was unable to keep track of all the money. I frequently made mistakes when I was writing up the accounts. After a few days I decided that I was not qualified to do the job.

I went and told Bhagavan, 'Instructing the masons and the other workers does not cause me much trouble. But keeping these accounts and disbursing the correct wages is very difficult. I don't think I can do this job properly because I make a lot of mistakes. When we are short of money I worry a lot about making mistakes.'

Bhagavan made no reply but a devotee called Raghavendra Rao who was sitting in the hall at the time came forward and volunteered to look after all the accounts for me. This Raghavendra Rao was a retired engineer who spent most of his spare time reading and studying the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In addition to doing the accounts, he also volunteered to help me supervise the building work. As an engineer, he must have known far more about buildings than I did, but he never disputed any of my plans. He was content to work as my assistant because he knew that I was merely carrying out the instructions that Bhagavan had given me.

If Bhagavan gave jobs to ashram workers he always expected them to be done properly. He never tolerated sloppy workmanship. If the ashram residents failed to produce work that satisfied

him he would either take them off the job or insist that they do the work again. Sometimes, if Bhagavan was not satisfied with the way that a particular job was being done, he would personally intervene and do the work himself.

Although he enforced exacting standards in the work that was done by ashram workers, he was less willing to intervene in the work that was done by outsiders. If non-residents were ever guilty of bad workmanship he would usually ask one of the resident devotees to repair the damage or do the job again. I was given several jobs of this sort during my years at the ashram.

On one occasion some tongs were needed to take the charcoal out of Bhagavan's *kumutti* [brazier]. The blacksmith who was engaged to do the job made a good pair of tongs but the surface of the metal handles was very rough and uneven. Bhagavan accepted the tongs without complaint, but when the blacksmith had gone he turned to me and asked me to complete the work by smoothing the handles with sandpaper and a file.

The next time the blacksmith came to the ashram Bhagavan handed him the newly-polished tongs and said, 'See if you can tell if this is the instrument that was made by you'.

The blacksmith accepted the implied criticism with a smile and complimented us on how well we had improved on his handiwork.

Sometimes small pieces of charcoal from this brazier exploded and jumped out onto the floor. Bhagavan, who never lost an opportunity to give us a spiritual lesson, once used this natural phenomenon to explain the relationship between the mind and the Self.

'This is how the mind comes out of the Self, like a spark jumping out of a fire. In the same way that this piece of charcoal will have no heat if it is kept separate from the fire, similarly, the mind has no power or energy of its own while it imagines that it is separate from the Self.'

Then, picking up the charcoal with a pair of tongs, he put it back in the fire, saying, 'This is the *jīva* [individual self]. It must be made to go back into Siva, the Self.'

I had another repair job to do after some outside workers had done a very bad job of constructing a wall around the ashram well. The job had been done so hurriedly and badly that some of the stones stuck out from the plane of the wall while others were

recessed. The workers had not even bothered to fill all the gaps between the stones with cement. When Bhagavan saw the wall he told me to make the surface even and to fill in all the gaps. I couldn't make the wall completely smooth but I did what I could by putting small stones and cement in the big holes and cement in the smaller holes and cracks. When the masons who had done such a bad job showed up at the ashram again, Bhagavan adopted the same tactics that he had used on the blacksmith.

Without voicing any direct criticism he showed them the wall and said, 'Look how well Annamalai Swami has repaired this wall that you built'.

Many years later Bhagavan asked me to do some similar repairs in the Mother's Temple. On one of his inspection tours Bhagavan had noticed that there were occasional gaps between the flagstones around the *garbhagriha* [inner shrine]. Some of these holes were as much as an inch across. He also pointed out a few gaps between some of the stones in the wall and asked me to fill them in. This job which I did sometime in the 1940s was one of the last pieces of masonry work that I ever did for the ashram.

In the beginning, when I first began to supervise the ashram's building projects, I used to think: 'This job will soon be over. When it is finished I can go back to the hall and sit with Bhagavan.'

Bhagavan had never told me, 'From now on you must work full-time on these construction jobs'. I had just assumed that in the times when there was no work to do I would be able to go back to the hall and sit with Bhagavan. It was Bhagavan himself who disabused me of this notion. As soon as I had finished one job he would invariably find something else for me to do. In all the years that I worked for him there was hardly ever a day when I was able to sit with him in the hall during working hours.

I didn't feel this loss too keenly because I was compensated by several small privileges. In the early morning, before the construction work started, Madhava Swami and I used to help Bhagavan with his bath. Both of us used to give him an oil massage on his back and legs before he took his bath. In the evening between 8 and 9.30 I was also allowed to massage Bhagavan's feet with oil. While I was massaging his feet I would either talk to him about spiritual matters or discuss building plans with him. In the

evenings, after I had finished the massage, Bhagavan also permitted me to rest my head on his feet for a few minutes.

Before I continue with any more stories I feel that I should give a brief explanation as to why virtually all the men in Sri Ramanasramam were called 'Swami'. Strictly speaking, the title 'Swami' should only be used by those who have been formally initiated into one of the traditional orders of *sannyāsa*. None of the 'Swamis' in the ashram had been formally initiated. Most of them acquired their titles merely because Bhagavan began to address them in this way. Bhagavan always spoke to people in a very respectful manner. When he wanted to call one of the *sādhus* in the ashram he would often say their name and then add the suffix 'Swami' as a mark of respect. He did this so often that the ashram *sādhus* eventually incorporated the word 'Swami' in their names. Normally, when one becomes a *sannyāsin*, one is given a new name which is prefixed by the title of 'Swami'. Most of the *sādhus* in the ashram kept their original name and merely added the word 'Swami' as a suffix.

Many devotees wanted Bhagavan to initiate them and give them formal *sannyāsa* but so far as I am aware he never acceded to any of their requests. Some persistent devotees would bring the *kāshāyam* [the orange robe worn by *sannyāsins*] to the hall and ask Bhagavan to present it or merely touch it as an act of blessing, but Bhagavan would not even give this limited sanction.

Sadhu Natanananda, the compiler of *Upadēsa Manjari* [*Spiritual Instruction* in its English translation], was one of the devotees who tried to get Bhagavan to present him with *kāshāyam*.

Bhagavan refused by saying, 'I am not in the habit of giving *kāshāyam* to anyone'.

Natanananda then put the *kāshāyam* on the stool in front of Bhagavan's couch that was used for devotees' offerings. Bhagavan refused to touch the cloth and after a few minutes Natanananda took it away.

Sadhu Natanananda went ahead and became a *sannyāsin* but he soon became dissatisfied with the lifestyle. After a few months he came back to the ashram, discarded his orange robes, and began wearing ordinary clothes again.

I had to give a building report to Bhagavan every evening. I would tell him what had been accomplished and what still needed

to be done. Sometimes Bhagavan would give me instructions for the next day. At other times I would present my own plans and get his approval for them. I thus found myself in the enviable position of having a fairly long intimate talk with Bhagavan every evening. Other devotees who were afraid to speak to Bhagavan because they were overawed by his majesty and grandeur used me as an intermediary. Knowing that I talked freely to Bhagavan every day, they would tell me their problems and request that I ask Bhagavan for a solution to them.

There was another small privilege which I greatly valued. There were two sittings for both lunch and dinner. Bhagavan always ate with the first sitting whereas I usually ate at the second sitting. Bhagavan would usually be finishing his meal as I walked into the dining room. If he was still eating when I arrived I would sit opposite him and wait expectantly. My patience was often rewarded. On many occasions Bhagavan would push his leaf-plate towards me to indicate that I could have my meal served on it. The serving ladies would take the hint, put the leaf in front of me, and serve me my meal.

*The small quantity of food which adhered to the plate was regarded as the Guru's prasād. Because of this there was often fierce competition to get Bhagavan's plate.*

My strong desire to eat Bhagavan's leftovers once made me very sick. It happened because I had been inspired by a story about a yogi called Guru Namasivaya who lived on Arunachala several hundred years ago. One day this yogi's Guru vomited and asked him to clean up the mess.

He told his disciple, 'Put this where we cannot walk, where it cannot touch our feet'.

Guru Namasivaya ate the vomit, regarding it all the time as his Guru's *prasād*. His Guru was very pleased and congratulated him on his devotion.

I remembered this story when Bhagavan once had a bad toothache. To alleviate the pain Bhagavan put a piece of tobacco between his teeth for a few minutes and then spat it out. I decided, rather foolishly, to show my devotion by emulating Guru Namasivaya. I convinced myself that the tobacco was Bhagavan's *prasād*, crushed it between my teeth and swallowed it. Almost

immediately afterwards I had severe stomach pains and a great feeling of nausea. I felt like vomiting on several occasions but I managed to avoid it by drinking large quantities of water.

*Many of the chemicals in tobacco are highly poisonous. During smoking a lot of these chemicals are either burnt off or filtered out of the smoke by the cilia in the lungs. If one eats tobacco, all the poisons enter the body.*

Whenever I was supervising construction work, Bhagavan would often tell me, 'You are working hard in the heat of the day. You may eat whatever you want.'

The serving ladies, aware of Bhagavan's concern for me, always served me large amounts of curd and ghee [clarified butter] to counteract the heat. I also had a remedy of my own. In the summer, when the heat was almost unbearable, I found that mixing a chopped raw onion with my food helped me to keep my body cool. I ate such a lot of raw onion one summer that many people started to call me 'Onion Swami'.

In the early days, before large numbers of people started to come to the ashram, it was often possible to talk to Bhagavan while he was eating in the dining room. On one occasion I was sitting next to Bhagavan while he was eating his morning iddies.

*An iddly is a small, steamed cake made from the fermented dough of rice and black gram. Iddlies were the most commonly occurring item in the ashram's breakfasts.*

I asked Bhagavan some spiritual questions but before he had a chance to complete his answer Chinnaswami interrupted us by saying, 'Why are you asking questions while Bhagavan is eating? Ask your questions at a more convenient time.'

Before continuing with his answer, Bhagavan turned to Chinnaswami and said, '*Jnāna* is more important than eating iddies. This time will never come again. If we stop talking now, a suitable occasion may not come again.'

So many people wanted to eat from Bhagavan's leaf-plate that eventually a rota system was established. In the early days, when we were still using the old dining room, there was no formal system. Because I would deliberately come into the dining room and sit near Bhagavan as he was finishing his meal, more often

than not I would end up with the leaf. Sometimes one of the other devotees would complain to me about my near monopoly.

‘You are taking Bhagavan’s leaf almost every day. You are earning so much *punya*. You have so many opportunities to get Bhagavan’s leaf. Please let me eat off this leaf for just one day.’

If anyone complained in this manner I would hand over the leaf to him. When the new dining room was completed I only managed to get the leaf on a few occasions. In later years Bhagavan stopped giving away his leaf. When he found that people were hanging around him at the end of each meal, merely waiting for his leaf, he put an end to the practice by announcing that henceforth no one would be permitted to eat from it.

There were other forms of *prasād* available in the dining room. At the end of each meal Bhagavan would wash his hands in a small vessel which he kept near his leaf. I drank that water almost every day. In addition to this I also used to drink the water that had been served to Bhagavan. The serving women would always put a cup of hot water next to Bhagavan’s plate. He would usually drink half and leave the other half in the cup. Whenever he did this I used to drink the water that remained. In later years, when I lived in Palakottu and cooked my own food, I still occasionally got to drink this water. Mudaliar Patti, one of the women who brought food to Bhagavan every day, sometimes collected it from the dining room and brought it to me because she knew how much I valued it.

Bhagavan made me work very hard but at the same time he was always very kind and considerate towards me. One incident which happened in the dining room shows this very well. I had spent the whole morning supervising masons who were constructing some steps near the dispensary. If I had not been present it is quite likely that they would either have failed to put enough packing under the stones, or put the stones themselves in the wrong place. The work took so long I was very late for my lunch. When I reached the dining room I found that the food which had been served on my plate had gone cold and that there were several wasps sitting on it. One of the servers scolded me for being so late.

‘You may be working,’ she said, ‘but we are also working. You should not turn up late like this, you should come on time.’

Bhagavan, who was outside at the time, cleaning his teeth, overheard what they were saying.

He called out in a loud voice: 'Annamalai Swami is not keeping himself idle. If he had come earlier, the work which he has been supervising would not have been done properly. If you need some rest you can go and have a rest. I will come and serve Annamalai Swami myself.'

This intervention shocked the women so much that they took away my old meal and served me a fresh hot one on a new plate.

I can think of two other incidents which also illustrate the kind of concern which Bhagavan showed to me. The first occurred after I had injured myself by dropping a large granite stone on my toe. I decided to spend the day resting in my room because my foot was far too painful to walk on. Many people in the ashram knew that I was injured, but no one remembered to bring me any food or medicine. Bhagavan noticed my absence during the midday meal and made a few enquiries about me. When he discovered that I had been left languishing in my room, without food or medical attention, he got very annoyed with all the people there.

'You are extracting so much work from this man,' said Bhagavan. 'You are all saying how wonderful it will be when all these new buildings are completed. But now that he is sick, nobody is bothering to take care of him.'

Bhagavan apparently continued in this vein for quite some time. As a consequence, after lunch I was surprised to receive a rather shame-faced delegation of devotees bearing gifts of food and medicine. They apologised for their previous neglect and told me how Bhagavan had reacted to it.

The second incident happened shortly after a *jayanti* celebration.

'Jayanti' means 'victory'. Throughout this book the term *jayanti* refers to the day on which Bhagavan's birthday is celebrated.

A large donation of vegetables had been received by the ashram. It was clear that unless they were preserved in some way most of them would rot before they could be consumed. Bhagavan decided that the best thing to do would be to cut up the vegetables and dry them in the sun. This would make them last for several weeks. Since it would be a big job Bhagavan asked Chinna-swami to call all the devotees to help with the cutting. I left my building work and came along with the others.

When Bhagavan saw me reporting for duty he said, 'This rule is not for you. It is only for the others. You are already working all day without any rest.'

Bhagavan did not always encourage me to rest if I was sick or injured. On one occasion I had a great pain in my foot which felt like someone was hitting it repeatedly with an iron spike. There was nothing visible that was causing the pain so I couldn't do anything about it. That day Bhagavan had given me many jobs to do. I limped around the ashram, doing as many of them as I could, but I left out one of them because I didn't have enough time. When I had completed all the work except for this one job I went to Bhagavan and told him that I had a great pain in my foot. Bhagavan ignored my remark and asked me if I had done the one job that I had failed to do. I told him that I hadn't been able to do it because of the pain in my foot.

Bhagavan told me, 'Go and do this one last job and the pain will go. While the work is in progress the pain will disappear.'

Bhagavan's prediction proved, as usual, to be correct.

I cannot say that I always enjoyed working so hard. It would have been nice to have had a day off occasionally. I once tried to take a short break but it had such disastrous consequences that I never tried again. It happened when I was feeling very tired because of a long period of work without any rest. I went and asked Bhagavan if I could take a break from my duties and do *giri pradakshina* [walking around the mountain]. I told him that I had had this desire to do a *pradakshina* for quite some time. Bhagavan knew that I had a lot of work pending so initially he refused to give permission. He didn't actually say 'no', he just kept silent. I should have accepted his silence as an answer but rather stupidly I persisted with my request.

Finally, Bhagavan gave me a positive answer: 'You are often saying that you want time off so that you can do some meditation. Do *giri pradakshina* and meditate while you are walking.'

I walked around the hill but my mind was too restless to meditate. I felt guilty about abandoning my work even though Bhagavan had reluctantly given me permission to do so. My feelings of guilt increased enormously when I arrived back at the ashram. I was greeted by a large group of devotees, all demanding to know where I had been. They told me that as soon as I had left the ashram Bhagavan had abandoned his sofa and had begun to supervise the work which I had chosen to neglect. He had been out in the sun, supervising the work, for all the hours that I had been away. No one had managed to persuade him to go inside. Those devotees who had come for his *darshan* had been forced to do their

*namaskāram* in the mud and lime that surrounded his feet. Chinnaswami and the other devotees were understandably annoyed with me for putting Bhagavan to all this inconvenience. Bhagavan himself said nothing but I easily understood his silent lesson: attending to the work which Bhagavan assigns is more important than taking time off for meditation or *giri pradakshina*.

Bhagavan was more accommodating when there was nothing going on in the ashram that needed supervising. During one such slack period I decided to make a trip to the top of the hill. I sought and got Bhagavan's permission to go and then asked him to tell me the quickest way of getting to the summit. Bhagavan took me to the back of the ashram and showed me the undulating spur of land which stretches from the peak almost to the back of the ashram.

As he was pointing to the spur Bhagavan said, 'There are three peaks on this spur. You will notice them as you walk up. Keep your eye on each of these peaks and always walk towards them. When you have reached the top of the third peak you will find that you cannot continue in a straight line towards the top. Walk a little to one side and then climb directly to the main peak.'

Ramaswami Pillai was listening to these directions. As Bhagavan finished speaking he remarked, 'The four peaks are like the peaks of *karma*, *yōga*, *bhakti* and *jnāna*. One has to surmount each of the peaks in turn.'

I followed Bhagavan's instructions and reached the summit very easily. Since I was a little concerned that I would get hungry on the way and lose all my energy, I took a bag containing iddlies, peanuts, dhal, bananas, coconut and water. I ate snacks at regular intervals and never experienced any hunger or energy loss.

On my return I rather proudly announced to Bhagavan, 'I was not affected by hunger at any time during the day'.

Bhagavan laughed and made fun of me by saying, 'How could you possibly get hungry? You were eating all day.'

Bhagavan himself stopped going to the summit some time in the mid 1920s. He enjoyed walking on the hill but he knew that if he started to walk towards the top everyone in the ashram would try to follow him.

In 1938 a devotee from Salem called Rajagopala Iyer asked Sri Bhagavan about the various paths to the top of the hill.

Bhagavan described the best routes and then commented, 'If the climbing is done slowly no one will have any difficulty'.

Subramaniam Iyer, who overheard Bhagavan saying this, then tried to recruit Bhagavan into his climbing party by saying, 'If Bhagavan accompanies us, none of us will experience any problems'.

Bhagavan jokingly replied, 'If I come, everyone in the ashram will join me. Even the buildings will come with us!'

A lady who was listening to our talk asked Bhagavan, 'Can Bhagavan still climb this hill?'

Bhagavan laughed and replied, 'I can still climb this hill, and I can also climb any other hill!'

*Arunachala is about 2,600 feet high. At the time of this incident Bhagavan was about fifty-eight years old. In his younger days he often went from Skandashram, situated about 600 feet up the mountain, to the peak and back in about one hour. A normal, healthy adult would usually take at least twice as much time as this to cover the same distance. Bhagavan's climbing ability is even more remarkable when one considers that he never wore shoes or sandals.*

In the early days, when Bhagavan was staying at Virupaksha Cave, he frequently used to go to the summit alone, stay for some time, and then return to the cave. He told me that on one occasion when he went to the peak by himself he was secretly followed by a devotee called Coutrallam Swami. Ten minutes after Bhagavan reached the top, Coutrallam Swami appeared with a mud pot containing water. He had followed Bhagavan to the summit, carrying this pot on his back, so that Bhagavan should not suffer from thirst after his long climb.

Coutrallam Swami, who was also known as Sivaya or Mauni Swami, eventually left Bhagavan and became a famous spiritual figure in his own right. He became the head of several *maths*, had many followers, and even had a big car, a great rarity in those days.

Some people thought that he was a rather arrogant man but Bhagavan once spoke to me about him in glowing terms: 'He is a good devotee but he does not show his devotion externally. The devotion is all inside. He hides it so well that most people think that he is not a good devotee. I like this kind of devotion very much.'

## Ashram Food

When Bhagavan woke up, usually between 3 and 4 a.m., he would go to the kitchen to start cutting the vegetables that were to be cooked that morning. The other kitchen workers, who slept longer, would join him a little later. Before he started on the work Bhagavan would generally cut a piece of ginger into small pieces, add a little salt, and then swallow it. This was his home remedy for his chronic digestion problems.

Bhagavan was, seemingly, a very democratic head cook: he would always begin the day by asking the kitchen workers what they would like to cook for the midday meal. Everyone would be asked about his ideas and plans and the various alternatives would be discussed until some kind of consensus was reached. The vegetables would then be cut according to the agreed plan but when the cooking started Bhagavan, without consulting anyone else, would often change the recipe.

Towards the end of the morning, when the cooking would be nearly over, Bhagavan would often say, quite innocently, 'We planned to cook a particular way but it seems to have come out differently'.

Those of us who worked alongside him often felt that these early morning discussions took place merely to encourage us to take an interest in the work. These mid-morning changes were never resented. We all accepted Bhagavan's absolute authority and we were always happy to go along with any of his changes or suggestions.

Since Bhagavan was usually the first person to reach the kitchen, it was his job to start the fire. A man called Ranga Rao who was also an early riser sometimes tried to relieve Bhagavan of this chore but he rarely succeeded. Others tried to relieve him of the grinding work, with only a little more success. When the vegetable cutting was over, Bhagavan would wrap a towel around his head and grind chutney in one of the stone mortars. He would put all his strength and energy into the grinding, only abandoning it if some strong, experienced devotee volunteered to take over the work. Once the chutney was finished, he would wash his hands and go to the morning *pārāyana* [chanting of scriptural works].

Bhagavan would keep in touch with the kitchen work while he was sitting in the hall. Sampurnammal, or one of the other cooks, would bring samples of the sambar and the vegetables as soon as they were ready. After tasting them Bhagavan would either give his approval or give some new instruction such as 'Add more salt'. If the cooks ever forgot to bring their samples, Bhagavan would leave the hall in the middle of the morning, go to the kitchen and see for himself whether or not the food had been prepared correctly.

Usually, everyone was happy to follow Bhagavan's instructions but there were a few occasions when he had to exert his authority. I remember in particular one occasion when he taught the cooks how to make aviyal properly. Aviyal is a spicy vegetable dish containing many different vegetables, coconut and curd. Bhagavan had insisted on many occasions that the chillies and other spices should be ground into a paste before they were added to the simmering vegetables. Since this was a very laborious and time-consuming activity, the cooks once decided to add powdered spices to the meal instead of hand-ground paste. Bhagavan somehow found out what had happened. On the next occasion that aviyal was prepared Bhagavan himself came to the kitchen and ground the spices. I happened to walk into the kitchen while he was doing the work.

Noticing that he alone was working and that all the women were standing around watching, I said, 'There are many people working in the kitchen. Why is Bhagavan alone doing this work?'

Bhagavan explained what was going on: 'I told them to make a paste out of the chillies but they didn't follow my instructions. So, to make sure that it is done properly, I am doing the work myself. It is no hardship for me. It is good exercise for the hands and arms.'

I turned to the women and scolded them a little: 'There are so many people here but you are letting Bhagavan do all the hard work. Why are you idly standing around like this?'

Bhagavan made no comment; he just carried on grinding. The women took his silence to be an indication that he was willing to hand over the work to someone else.

They all started saying, 'Let me do it,' 'I will do it,' 'Let me take over'.

Bhagavan laughed and said, 'Only now you are asking. Why didn't you ask before?'

He finished the work without permitting anyone else to take the stone from him. Then, after adding the paste to the aviyal and stirring it with a spoon, he personally cleaned both of the grinding stones. It was a good lesson for everyone: powdered spices were never again added to aviyal.

I can remember another occasion when Bhagavan taught us a lesson by doing work himself. There was a room near the kitchen which was rarely cleaned. It was dusty and dirty and the floor was usually covered with old banana leaves and vegetable cuttings. Many people walked through this room but no one ever took the trouble to tidy it until Bhagavan himself took a broom and completely cleaned the whole room.

While Bhagavan was doing the job several devotees tried to stop him, saying, 'Please Bhagavan, let me do this work. I will clean this room.' Bhagavan refused to hand over his broom.

To all volunteers he gave the same reply: 'Only now your eyes are on this. Did you not see the mess before?'

Bhagavan collected all the rubbish on a large piece of paper, took it outside and threw it away. From that day on the room was cleaned regularly.

When I gave an account of how Bhagavan involved himself with the construction activities in the ashram I mentioned that he sometimes started buildings when there was no money available to complete them. I once saw him adopt a similar strategy in the kitchen. One morning, when there was virtually no food in the ashram, I saw him take what little food we had and begin to cook a meal. He had enough faith to begin the meal in the expectation that God would send more food before the cooking was over. It was about 5.30 in the morning when Bhagavan began to clean a handful of broken rice. He washed it in a pot, took all the stones out, and then started cooking it on a *kumutti* [charcoal brazier]. I found these activities rather perplexing.

'This rice,' I thought, 'is not even sufficient for me. How are all these people going to eat?'

As the rice came to the boil a devotee appeared with two litres of milk. When the rice was cooked, Bhagavan put a larger vessel on the *kumutti* and began cooking the rice and milk together. A few minutes later another devotee came with an offering of raisins and sugar candy. Bhagavan washed the offering and put it in the pot. At about 6.30, when the cooking was nearly finished, a party

of devotees arrived from Kumbakonam. They brought with them a big pot containing iddlies, vadai, chutney, special hill bananas and some cups which had been made out of banana leaves. These banana-leaf cups [*tonnai*] were just what we needed to serve Bhagavan's home-made payasam.

*Although payasam, a sweet sticky porridge, is usually made from cereal, milk, sugar, and sometimes fruit, Bhagavan's ingredients were very unorthodox.*

At about 7 a.m., after Bhagavan had taken his bath, we all sat down and ate a sumptuous breakfast.

Many people have written about Bhagavan's dislike of wasting anything useful. This habit was often on display in the kitchen. Once, as the midday meal was being prepared, a few mustard seeds fell on the ground. The cooks ignored them but Bhagavan picked them up one by one with his fingernails and put them in a small pot.

Sama Iyer, one of the brahmins who worked in the kitchen, remarked, 'Bhagavan is taking these few mustard seeds and saving them. Bhagavan is also very miserly about saving money. For whom is Bhagavan saving all this?'

'All these things are created by God,' replied Bhagavan. 'We should not waste even small things. If it is useful for someone, it is good to keep it.'

Bhagavan often ignored our many faults but he rarely kept quiet if he witnessed any devotees being wasteful. In June 1939, when Bhagavan was returning from one of his walks on the hill, I saw him accost the son of T.K. Sundaresa Iyer and give him a stern lecture.

'Your father tells me that you are buying many useless things,' said Bhagavan. 'Don't spend in excess of your income. You must be thrifty. Fire, debt, sense objects and poison. Even a drop of any of these is capable of destroying us.'

Bhagavan once gave me a similar lecture while I was supervising the construction of the new dining room. He had given me a rusty, bent 1½ inch nail and asked me to clean it, straighten it, and use it in the dining room.

'But Bhagavan,' I protested, 'we have just received many kilos of brand-new nails. We don't need to use old ones like this.'

Bhagavan disagreed. After telling me that everything that was

useful should be used, he repeated his instructions about renovating the nail.

Bhagavan's insistence on frugality and his abhorrence of waste led him to manufacture many tools and implements from locally available materials. When he lived at Skandashram he once took a big granite stone, about 2½ feet square, and spent many days smoothing its surface by rubbing sand and water on it. At the end of that time the surface of the stone was so smooth and polished one could see one's face in it. This stone was used to cool rice after it had been cooked. In the late 1930s four or five devotees went to Skandashram to collect this stone because they knew it had been made by Bhagavan. They carried it down the hill and installed it in the new kitchen. Following Bhagavan's example, several devotees polished some new stones, about ten feet square, and used them for the same purpose.

Although Bhagavan was willing to spend several hours each day ensuring that the ashram food was cooked properly, he disliked elaborate meals consisting of many dishes. He was quite satisfied with rice, sambar and one vegetable dish. A lady from Kerala, who was accustomed to preparing a lot of dishes for each meal, once came for *darshan* and insisted on cooking for everyone. After a great expenditure of time and effort she succeeded in preparing and serving thirty-two separate dishes. Bhagavan allowed her to serve each item separately on his banana leaf, but when the serving was over he mixed up all the offerings into a single homogenised lump.

By way of explanation he told her, 'You had to expend a lot of energy preparing all this food. Just collecting the materials must have been very time consuming. One vegetable—which is enough to clean the stomach and keep one free of constipation—is enough. Why make all this? Then there is another trouble: if you prepare thirty-two dishes, the mind is always thinking, "Shall I eat this one or that one?" So the mind is also dissipated while eating. If there is one dish there is no trouble. We can eat it very simply. Also, meals like this set a bad example to people who have no food. Poor people will get to hear that we are serving luxurious meals and think, "We are very hungry, but these people, who are supposed to be simple *sādhus*, are eating so many dishes". Thoughts like these will cause unnecessary jealousy.'

Later he added, 'If Bhagavan were to eat one dish first, the

woman who is serving will think, "Oh, Bhagavan likes this very much". Then she will come and put another helping on my plate. This is why I mix everything into a single ball.'

In Bhagavan's early years on the hill most of the food was supplied by women devotees such as Mudaliar Patti and Echammal. They would prepare food in their houses and then bring it to either Virupaksha Cave or Skandashram. When the ashram started to cook its own food, both of the women continued to bring food every day. Mudaliar Patti used to bring enough food for about four people, Echammal enough for two. Both would bring their offerings to the midday meal and personally serve them to Bhagavan and the devotees. As the ladies grew older and the ashram kitchen facilities expanded, Bhagavan tried to dissuade them from bringing food, but neither was willing to give up her hard-won privilege of personally serving Bhagavan every day.

*Although Bhagavan requested Echammal to stop bringing food on several occasions, he was not in favour of issuing a formal ban. When Chittnaswami once forbade her from bringing food, in the interests of Bhagavan's health, Bhagavan refused to enter the dining room when the bell for the midday meal was rung. He never gave any reason but the devotees soon surmised that he was protesting against the ban on Echammal. Echammal by this time had gone back to town, so a delegation of devotees was despatched to fetch her. At first she was unwilling to come, since she was still angry with the ashram management, but when it was pointed out to her that Bhagavan would probably starve unless she came in person, she agreed to come and break the impasse. When she requested Bhagavan to go to the dining room and eat, he got up and went for his meal. No one in the previous hour had managed to persuade him to move from the old hall. After this incident Echammal's serving rights were never challenged again.*

Whenever Bhagavan saw Mudaliar Patti coming, his face would break out into a smile. Often, after she had served him, he would ask her for more food. Sometimes he would even call her back when she had finished serving him and help himself to some of the food that remained in her basket. This was very unusual: Bhagavan frequently criticised the servers for putting too much food on his plate and, except when Mudaliar Patti was there, he

rarely asked for second helpings. We all felt that it was Mudaliar Patti's love and devotion that elicited this gracious response from Bhagavan.

Since I was a non-brahmin I was not allowed to do any of the cooking. On the few occasions that I helped in the kitchen I was restricted to cutting up vegetables. There was one occasion, though, when Bhagavan broke the rules and let me do some cooking. It was the morning after a *jayanti* celebration. All the cooks were asleep, completely exhausted after feeding thousands of people the day before. Bhagavan took me, Madhava Swami and Ramakrishna Swami into the kitchen to make uppuma because it was clear that the cooks were not going to wake up in time to prepare the breakfast. Under Bhagavan's supervision we cut vegetables, shredded coconuts and made a large pot of rava uppuma.

*Uppuma is a thick porridge, made out of wheat, which contains a few fried vegetables and spices. Rava, its principle ingredient, is produced by crushing wheat grains into small particles.*

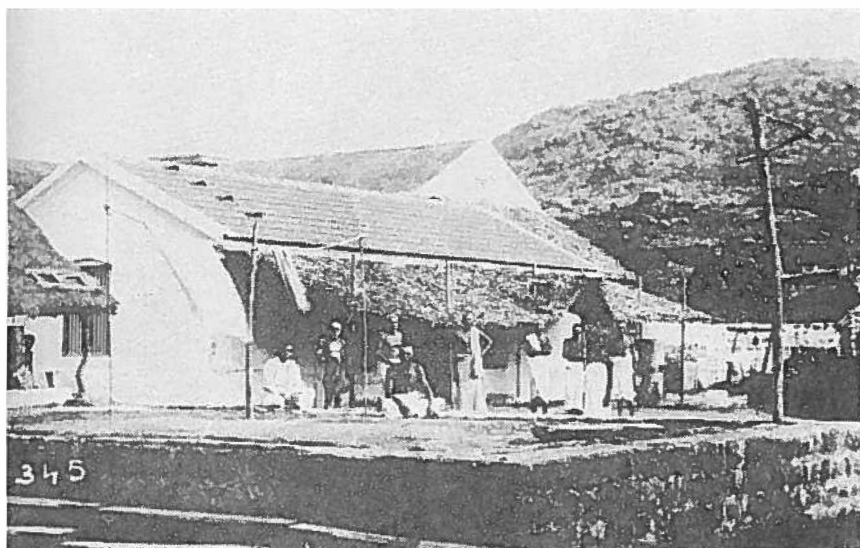
When it was ready Bhagavan gave me a sample to taste. At first I declined the offer because I hadn't had time to clean my teeth that morning. Bhagavan had taken me straight from my room to the kitchen.

Bhagavan didn't care what state my mouth was in. 'Just take it,' he said. 'We can clean our teeth afterwards.'

A little later he added, 'Don't tell any of the others that we did this cooking. The brahmins will not eat it if they find out that you cooked their food.'

This was a good example of Bhagavan's attitude to brahmin orthodoxy. He went to a lot of trouble to avoid offending the sentiments of orthodox brahmins, mainly by permitting only brahmins to cook the ashram's food, but he was not so strict that he was not willing to bend the rules once in a while if it was in a good cause. His attitude was governed by a desire to avoid complaints and dissension, rather than a desire to stick to the letter of caste *dharma*.

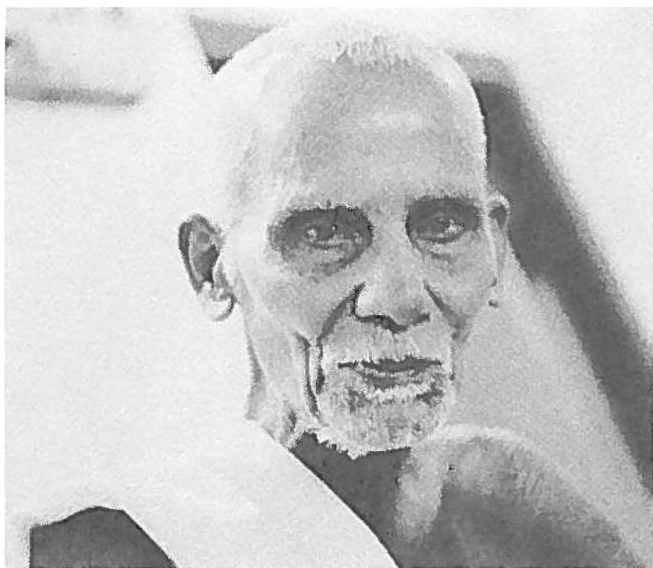
There was another incident, not connected with the kitchen, which also showed how unwilling he was to offend the feelings of the ashram brahmins. As I was walking with Bhagavan towards the cowshed we noticed some women cleaning rice near one of the guest rooms. One of them had recently spat out some betel juice on the



The old dining hall. The original thatched building shown  
is a previous photo was upgraded to a brick-and-tile structure.  
Everyone ate there up till 1938.



Mudaliar Patti, standing in a courtyard of the  
Arunachaleswara Temple.



Annamalai Swami, 1995



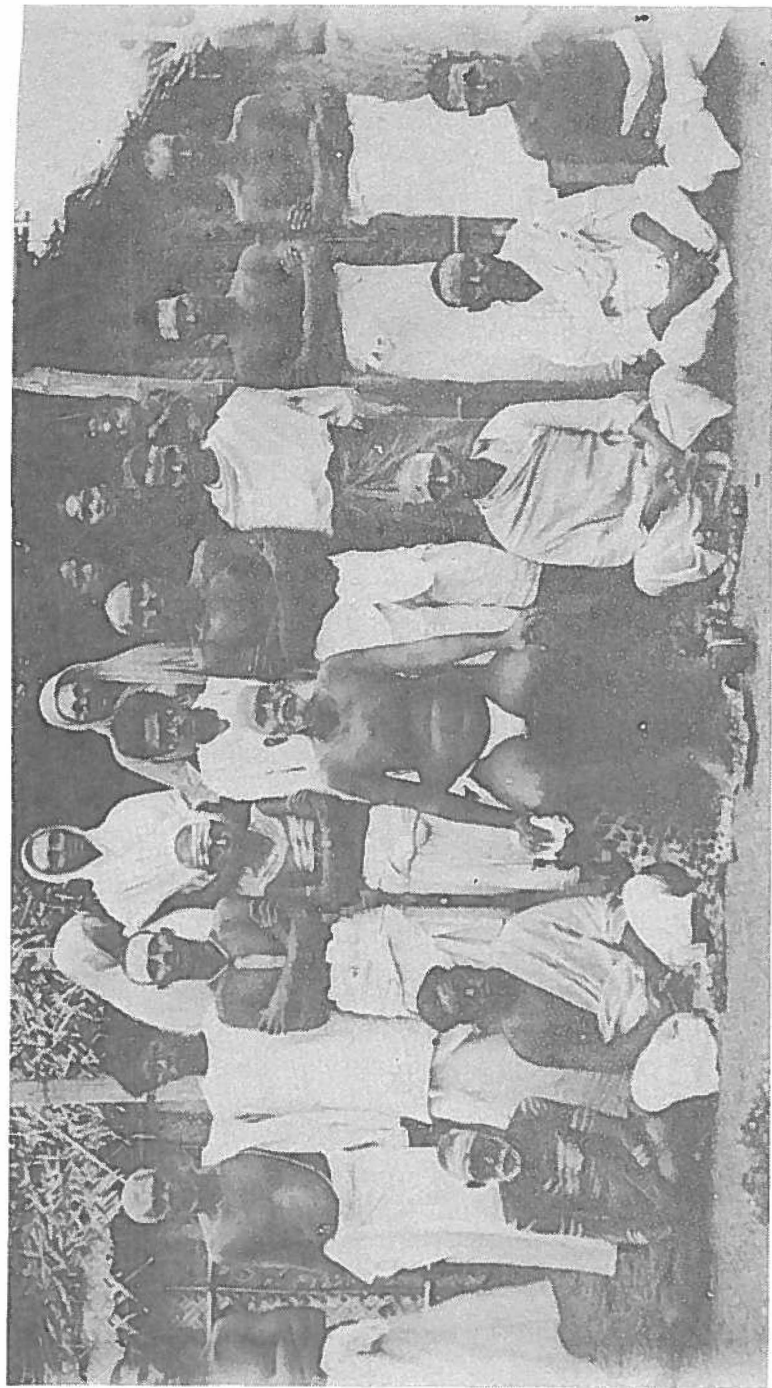
Echammal



Santammal, head cook for most of the 1930s and 40s.



Sampurnammal



In this and all subsequent group photos, only people who are mentioned in the text are identified.

Back row, right to left: 3rd Tenamma 4th Subbalakshmi Amma 5th Santammal.

Middle row, right to left: 2nd Subramaniam 3rd Kunju Swami 4th Ramaswami Pillai 6th Ramanatha Brahmachari  
7th Annamalai Swami 9th Samma Dada.

path that we were walking on. Using his bare foot, Bhagavan covered and buried the juice under a little mound of earth.

Not wanting Bhagavan's feet to come into contact with the saliva, I tried to stop him by saying, 'Why is Bhagavan doing this? I will do it.'

Bhagavan ignored my offer. 'What is the difference between "you" and "I"?' he asked. 'Many brahmins go this way to the *pāthasālā*. If they happened to see this on the path they would be very upset. I am only burying it to avoid hurting their feelings.'

I have mentioned before that some of the ashram workers who were afraid to talk directly to Bhagavan sometimes used me as an intermediary. Santammal, the head cook, once asked me to take a message to Bhagavan.

*Up till the late 1920s Chinnaswami was the ashram's head cook. After he took over the management of the ashram most of the cooking was done by a group of brahmin widows: Santammal, Sampurnammal, Tenamma Patti, Lokammal and Subbalakshmi Ammal.*

¶

She had become very weak as a result of working long hours in the kitchen.

'You are always talking with Bhagavan,' she remarked. 'Please tell him that I have a lot of pain in my body because of all this work that I have been doing. Please ask him what I should do.'

When I conveyed this message to Bhagavan he was not very sympathetic.

'She is working for the sake of her ego. She has the feeling, "I am doing all this work. I am responsible for everything in the kitchen." She is trying to show people that she is doing all the work and trying to get a good name because of it. She is complaining so that people will become aware of how hard she is working. Tell her to work less. Tell her just to supervise the other ladies. There are enough people in the kitchen to do all the heavy work. It is not necessary for her to show off in this way. If she follows my instructions, the pains will go away.'

Then, before I had a chance to deliver the message, Bhagavan himself went to the kitchen and told her, 'From now on, just supervise the other women. Let them do all the hard work.'

There was a man called Natesa Iyer who was also working in the kitchen at that time. He was a very humble man with almost no

will of his own. The women cooks took advantage of this by making him work very hard. Whatever work they gave him he did willingly, without any complaint, even though he was frequently very tired. When the women discovered how uncomplaining and pliable he was, they turned over all the heavy work to him.

After some time, when his health began to suffer, he came up to me and said, 'The women are extracting a lot of work from me. Please tell Bhagavan about this. Tell him that I am getting a lot of pain in the body from doing all this work. You often talk to him so you can easily mention this.'

On this occasion Bhagavan made no response. I don't know why he didn't overtly interfere in this matter by lightening Natesa Iyer's work load or by speaking to him about it, but it was very typical of him that he treated two very similar cases in such different ways. Bhagavan always responded to the devotees' state of mind rather than to the circumstances they found themselves in. If I had to make a guess in this particular case I would say that because Bhagavan prized humility above all other virtues, he may have thought that it would be good for Natesa Iyer to continue to react in a humble way to the constant bullying of the women cooks.

On *jayanti* days [the days when Bhagavan's birthday was celebrated] it was not possible to feed the thousands of visitors all at the same time. Several sittings would be arranged in the dining room and Bhagavan would always eat with the first batch. When the first sitting was over, Bhagavan would take a short stroll on the hill before returning to the old hall. From about midday till about 2.30 p.m. Bhagavan would remain alone inside the hall. During this time the doors of the hall would be locked in order to prevent him from being mobbed by all the visitors. It was the ashram's custom to feed anyone who turned up on *jayanti* day, so there were invariably large, unruly crowds to contend with. A lot of the visitors came only because they wanted a free meal. After the visitors had been fed and the crowds had been dispersed, Bhagavan would begin to give *darshan* again.

Because of the large number of people who wanted to see him, it was not possible for him to give *darshan* from his usual position in a corner of the old hall. Instead, the attendants would put his couch just inside the door. Visitors and devotees would come up to the doorway, have *darshan* and then leave.

One *jayanti* day, just before lunch, Bhagavan heard Chinna-swami calling out in a loud voice, 'No *paradēsīs* [*sannyāsins*] in the first batch!'

Bhagavan, who was walking towards the dining room, turned back and went inside the old hall. He evidently regarded himself as a *paradēsī* and felt that he had been barred from the dining room. This created a big problem because it was a long-established custom that no one should eat until Bhagavan had begun his meal. Chinnaswami came to the hall, apologised for giving such a discriminatory order, and requested Bhagavan to come and eat at the first sitting. Several of the older devotees also came and added their pleas. Bhagavan replied that he would not eat unless all the *paradēsīs* were allowed to eat with him. Chinnaswami readily agreed to this condition because the whole feeding programme, involving thousands of people, could not be initiated until Bhagavan took his seat in the dining room.

When Bhagavan gave *darshan* on *jayanti* days he generally cut out all casual conversation with his attendants and devotees because he didn't want all the many new visitors to get the idea that they ought to talk to him. For most of the day he would sit statue-like on his couch, with his eyes open, but not focussed on anything in particular. He would be so still that even his stomach and chest, which should have been gently rising and falling with his breathing, would show no signs of movement. Many devotees, including myself, felt that he radiated more than the usual amount of power and grace on *jayanti* days. We all felt this power very strongly when Bhagavan sat transfixed in these *samādhi*-like states.

## Ashram Animals

Some devotees once brought a baby deer and left it at the ashram. Initially, Bhagavan was reluctant to accept it.

‘Why do we want a deer in the ashram? Who will look after it?’ he asked.

It was only when Madhava Swami, Bhagavan’s attendant, volunteered to look after her that he allowed her to stay. The deer, which was called Valli, grew up as an ashram pet. Bhagavan regularly fed her with rice, dhal and cashew nuts, a mixture which she greatly liked. Some devotees also occasionally fed her with puffed rice and dhal. Valli had no interest in the puffed rice. She would pick out the dhal, piece by piece, and leave the rest.

Valli often came to the hall and put her forehead on the soles of Bhagavan’s feet. Sometimes when she did this Bhagavan would play with her by pushing his feet strongly against her head. Valli would respond by playfully butting Bhagavan’s feet. At other times, when Valli danced on her hind legs, Bhagavan would stand alongside her, imitating her actions by dancing with his feet and waving his arms.

One day Valli went off to graze with some goats. When they reached Easanya Math, about two miles away, someone attacked Valli and damaged one of her legs so badly she was unable to return to the ashram. She lay there, unattended, for over a day. When Valli failed to return to the ashram that night, Bhagavan sent me and Rangaswami out to look for her. Someone gave us false information that the deer had been seen on one of the Muslim streets in town. We went there, fearing that she might have ended up in a cooking pot, but no one there could recollect seeing her.

Valli was discovered the next day by a group of devotees who were walking near Easanya Math. They bandaged her leg and brought her back to the ashram. A local vet, who was also a devotee, examined her and decided that her leg had been broken. He bandaged it and gave us a few instructions on how to look after her. We put her in a corner of the old dining room but she never recovered from her injury. About a month later Bhagavan, sensing that she was about to die, went to the basket in which she was lying. It was very early, about 4 a.m. He sat next to her,

putting one hand on her head and one hand on her Heart-centre.

Bhagavan occasionally did this to devotees who were dying. His aim was to make the mind go back into the Heart and die there. When this technique was successfully applied, the fortunate devotee attained Self-realisation. He had first tried to do this with Palaniswami, one of his early attendants, but it was not a success. In later years he successfully brought about the Self-realisation of both his mother and Lakshmi the cow by touching them in this way while they were dying.

Bhagavan kept his hands in this position for about an hour. Once, during this period, Valli urinated on him but he paid no attention. He remained at her side, touching her head and Heart-centre, until she finally passed away at about 5 a.m. I don't think that Bhagavan brought about her Self-realisation because he never talked about the incident. If he had been successful I am sure that he would have told us about it.

*I recently came across another instance of a devotee being touched by Bhagavan in this way. So far as I know, the incident has never been fully recorded.*

*In 1939 a man called Sathya Narayana Rao was dying in one of the ashram rooms. He was apparently in great pain. A devotee brought news of this to the hall. Bhagavan initially seemed to be uninterested in the matter.*

*'What can I do?' he asked. 'Am I a doctor?' However, after a few minutes he got up and went with Krishnaswami to the room where the man was dying. Sathya Narayana Rao was lying on a bed in a small room which was next to the storeroom. Bhagavan sat next to him and put one hand on his head and the other on his Heart-centre. Sathya Narayana Rao had previously been twisting and turning in bed in an attempt to alleviate his pain, but a few seconds after Bhagavan touched him, he quietened down, closed his eyes, and lay still on the bed.*

*After about half an hour Bhagavan said, 'We have finished here. We can go and eat.'*

*Bhagavan had delayed going for lunch because he had wanted to finish his work with Sathya Narayana Rao. While Bhagavan was eating, a devotee came to inform him that Sathya Narayana Rao had died. However, before he died he had opened his eyes, smiled, and reached out to touch his two sisters.*

*When Bhagavan heard this he exclaimed, 'Ah! The thief came back again. I thought that his mind had completely subsided. His vāsanās [mental habits and tendencies] came up again. His attachment to his sisters made him reach out and touch them.'*

*In the case of Palaniswami, Bhagavan said that the 'I'-thought escaped through the eyes at the moment of death and took another birth. One can assume that something similar happened in this case.*

*This story was told to me by Krishnaswami who was an eye-witness to all these events. I also found that many of the circumstantial details were corroborated in an unpublished manuscript by Narasimha Rao, Sathya Narayana Rao's brother.*

Later that morning Bhagavan asked me to construct a small *samādhi* [shrine] near the back gate of the ashram.

'We should build a *samādhi* for Valli in the ashram itself,' he said. 'We don't need any masons, the two of us can build it together.'

I did the masonry work. Bhagavan just assisted me by handing me the bricks. When the main structure of the *samādhi* was completed, Bhagavan asked me to install a *lingam* and do *pūjā* to it. I accomplished both tasks with Bhagavan standing at my side. All this took several hours. While the *samādhi* was being built and the funeral ceremonies were being performed, Bhagavan did not go to the hall. The devotees who came for *darshan* all had to come to where we were working.

There are two other small *samādhis* next to Valli's: Jackie the dog and an anonymous crow. There is little to say about the crow. Madhava Swami found it one day in an unconscious state, lying on the ground in front of the hall. He gave it to Bhagavan, who patted its head and gently massaged it for some time. When it attained *samādhi* in Bhagavan's hands, he ordered a second shrine to be built next to Valli's.

*The word samādhi is often used as a euphemism for 'death'. The word has two other common meanings: 1) a burial shrine and 2) a trance-like state in which one has a direct experience of the Self.*

*In addition to the animal shrines at Sri Ramanasramam, Bhagavan constructed two animal samādhis while he was still living on the hill. The first was over a pet peacock which lived at Skandashram, the second over a parrot. Echammal saw this parrot being attacked by a crow as she was climbing the hill. She brought*

*it, in an injured condition, to Bhagavan, who was then living at Skandashram. Bhagavan tended it for five days before it died.*

*When he buried it on the hill he remarked, 'A building will come up here'.*

*The prediction came true: a building appeared soon afterwards on the samādhi site. The cave next to the building eventually became known as 'Kili Guha', the cave of the parrot.*

*So far as I am aware, the story of the parrot samādhi has not been published before. I found this version in an unpublished account of Echammal's life which was written by Krishna Bhikshu.*

Jackie the dog, who was eventually buried alongside the deer and the crow, was brought to the ashram when he was very young. He never mixed with other dogs, nor did he play much. Instead, he lived the life of a *sādhu*. He would sit in front of Bhagavan on an orange cloth that had been provided by a devotee and stare intently at Bhagavan's eyes. Because Bhagavan had a lot of love for him, and because he always behaved in such an exemplary fashion, he was always very well looked after. Ramaswami Pillai in particular took good care of him. Every day he would wash Jackie with soap and water and remove any insects that had attached themselves to his body. Whenever *prasād* was distributed, Jackie would not eat until Bhagavan began to eat his own portion. On such occasions he would watch Bhagavan's face intently. As soon as Bhagavan put a morsel into his mouth, Jackie would start to eat his own portion.

I remember one incident concerning Jackie that occurred while Bhagavan was sitting by the well, surrounded by devotees. Jackie was sitting with the devotees, looking intently at Bhagavan, when a stray dog entered the ashram through the back gate. Jackie, distracted by the newcomer, began to bark.

Bhagavan gently chided him by saying, 'You just close your eyes. You just close your eyes. You just close your eyes. If you do this you will not be able to see the dog.'

Jackie obeyed at once but some of the rest of us continued to look at the stray dog.

When I saw what was happening I laughed and remarked, 'This is a good teaching. It is not only for Jackie, it is for everyone.'

Jackie lived in the ashram for many years but I cannot remember how he finally passed away. It must have happened sometime in the 1930s while I was supervising the building works

because I remember constructing, at Bhagavan's request, the small *samādhi* shrine that is over his body.

*I found the following account of Jackie's death in an unpublished account by Narasimha Rao:*

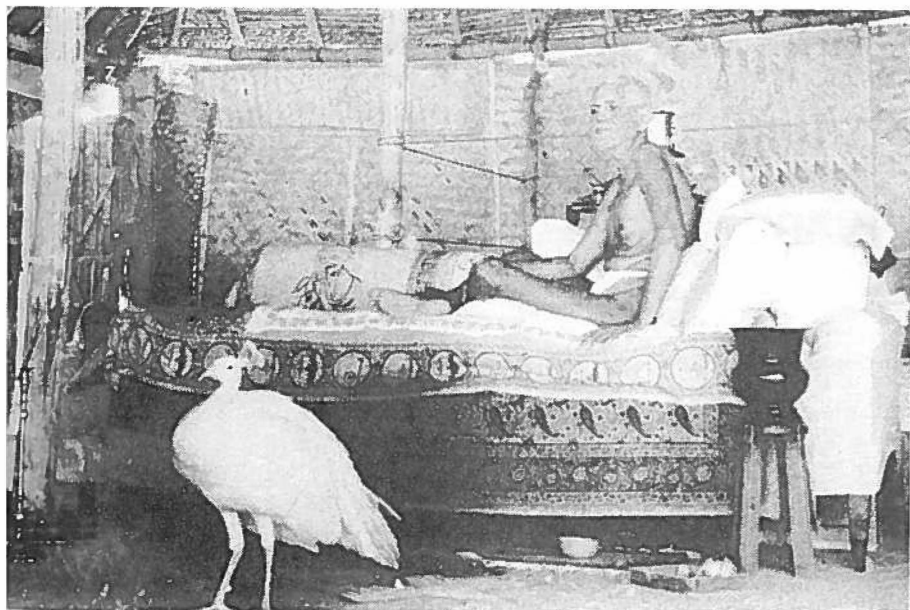
*'In the early days of our going to the ashram [early 1930s] there was a dog by name Jack. It was then very sick. Bhagavan arranged a soft bed for it and was attending it very affectionately, attending to his wants. After a few days it grew more weak, and was emitting a bad smell. It made no difference to Bhagavan's attention to it. He used to take it in his arms, and holding it to himself, caress it lovingly. Finally it expired in his hands. It was buried in the ashram precincts with a monument over it. The dog did not show any sign of suffering and bore it bravely.'*

The other *samādhi* in that line belongs to Lakshmi. Her story has been told in many books, so I shall not bother to repeat it here. Instead, I shall just mention one or two incidents about her which I think have not been recorded.

Whenever Lakshmi came for *darshan* she would walk very fast, not caring about anyone who stood in the way. It was left to the devotees to decide whether they wanted to get out of the way or be trampled on. When she reached Bhagavan's couch she would often stand in front of Bhagavan and put her head on his feet. If she came a little closer he would gently caress her head and neck. Often, they would be so close together that Lakshmi's saliva would fall on Bhagavan's body. If any special food was cooked in the ashram, Bhagavan would serve some to Lakshmi in the hall itself. I have seen him serving her iddies, payasam and vadai, all on a banana leaf, just as if she were a human being. Sometimes he would take the food directly to the cowshed and serve her there.

On one occasion, when there was very little grass in the ashram, Bhagavan noticed that Lakshmi was not getting enough to eat. That day when he went to the dining room he refused to eat the meal that had been served to him. Instead, he asked the servers to give it to Lakshmi. When news of this strange gesture reached the cowshed, the workers there realised that he was indirectly protesting against the maltreatment of Lakshmi. Some fodder was brought from the bazaar, enabling both Bhagavan and Lakshmi to resume their normal meals.

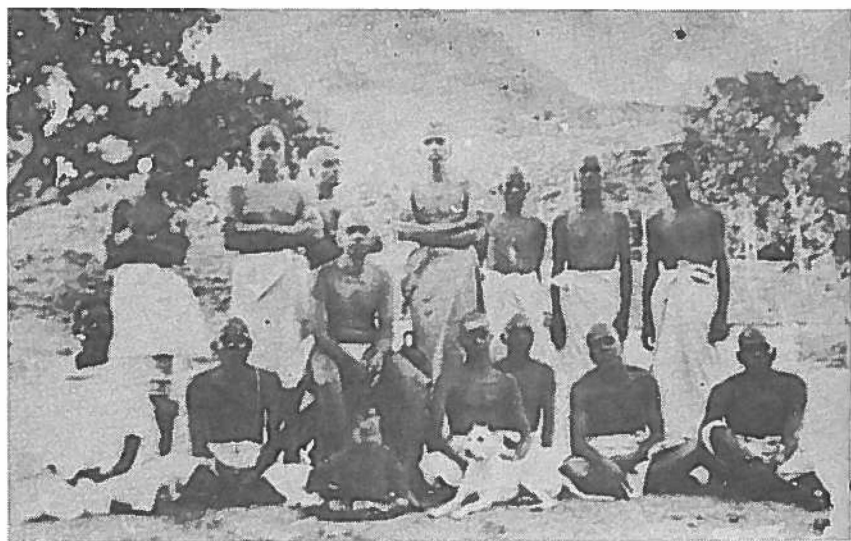
It has been widely reported that Lakshmi often gave birth to a



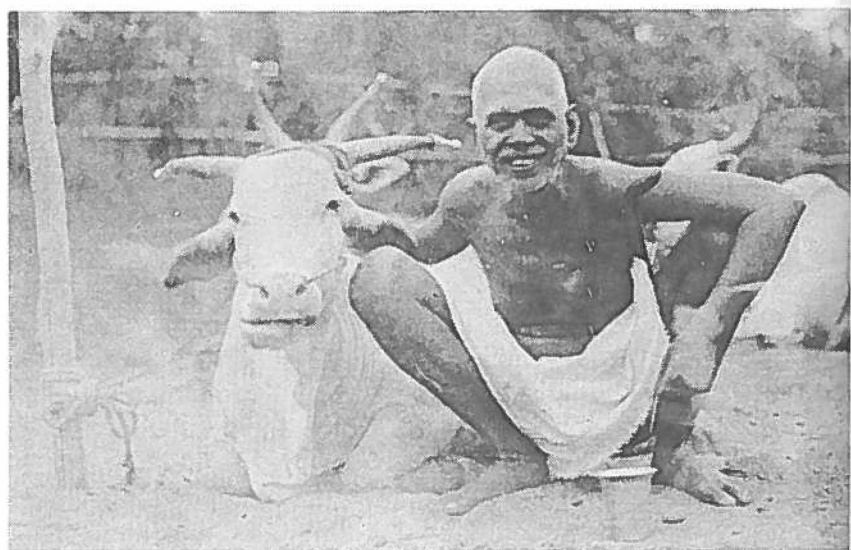
Bhagavan with the white peacock.



Animal *samādhis*, left to right: Valli the deer, the crow, Jackie the dog and Lakshmi the cow.



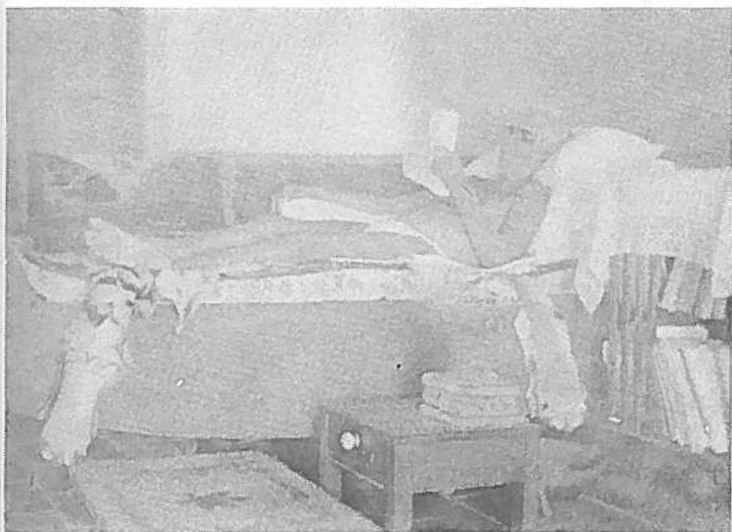
Jackie the dog in a rather blurred group photo, taken in the late 1920s.



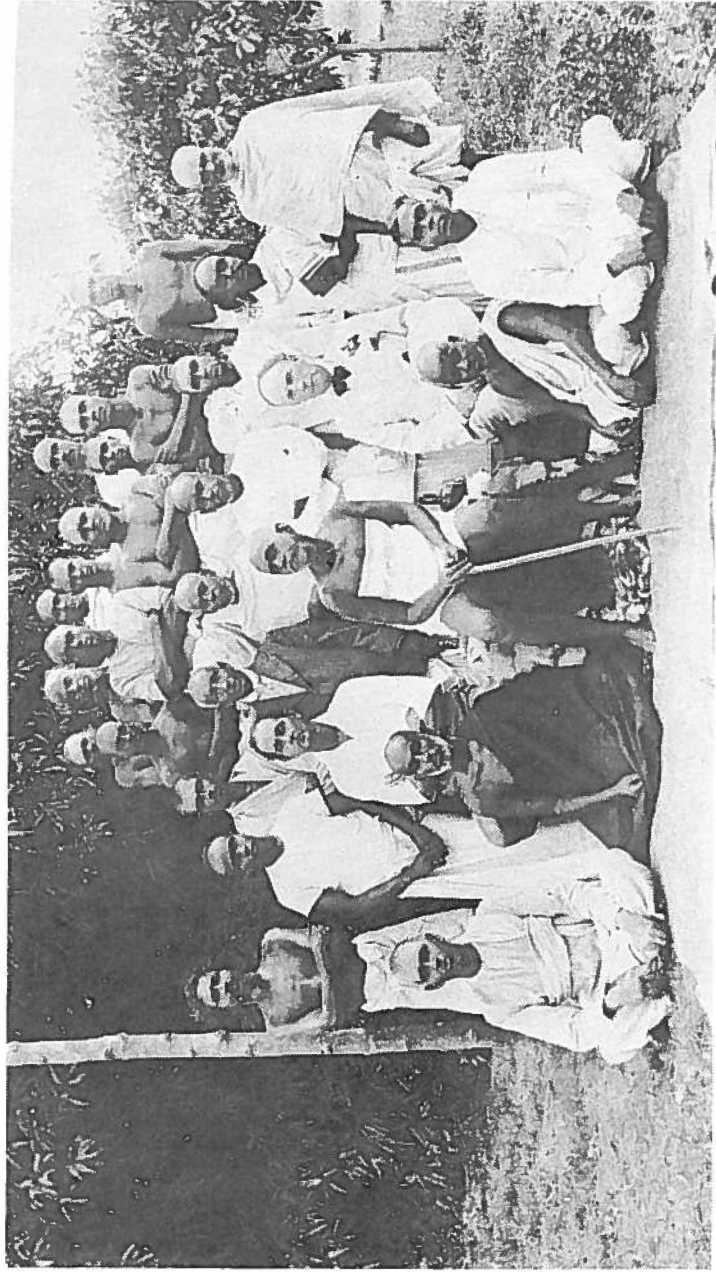
Lakshmi the cow with Bhagavan.



Skandashram: the path to Ramanasramam is seen on the left.



Bhagavan lying on his sofa, reading a magazine. His *kumutti* is on the stool by his side.



Standing, back-row group, right to left: 1st Madhava Swami 2nd Annamalai Swami (arms folded) 6th Subramaniam 7th Ramakrishna Swami 8th (in a shirt with folded arms) Ramaswami Pillai 10th Rangaswami.

Standing in a line, centre, right to left: 2nd T.K. Sundaresa Iyer 4th Ganapati Sastri.

Seated on the bench, right to left: 1st Grant Duff 2nd Bhagavan. Seated on the ground, right to left: 1st Narayana Iyer 2nd Munagala Venkataramiah 3rd Yogi Ramaiah 4th Chinna Swami.

calf on Bhagavan's birthday. I once saw one of these calves, pure white in colour, sitting in front of Bhagavan in the hall. Because of its colour and position it looked just like Nandi [the *vāhana* or mount of Siva]. At that time Bhagavan was sitting on a tiger skin, Valli the deer was sitting nearby, the *kumutti* was burning in front of the sofa, and there was a silver cobra nearby which was being used as an incense holder. With all these accoutrements of the mythical Siva in evidence, it looked like a scene from Mount Kailas [the mountain in the Himalayas where Siva is said to reside].

This reminds me of another small incident, not at all connected with animals, which occurred in the hall. A devotee had brought an album of religious pictures, all of them painted by the great artist Ravi Varma. Bhagavan was showing them to us, one by one, in the hall. When he came to a picture of Lord Siva meditating with closed eyes, I mentioned that it looked very nice.

Bhagavan's only comment was: 'Siva! If you sit with closed eyes like this, who will look after all the activities in the world?'

Many devotees believed that Lakshmi was a reincarnation of Keeraipatti, a woman who had served Bhagavan with food while he was living on the hill. Bhagavan never confirmed this, nor did he ever deny it. Many devotees also believed that the white peacock who lived with Bhagavan in the 1940s was a reincarnation of Madhava Swami, the attendant who served Bhagavan for many years. In this case Bhagavan seemed a little more willing to admit that one of his devotees had reincarnated in an animal body.

I was present in the hall when someone once asked Bhagavan, 'How is it that Madhava Swami came back as a white peacock?'

Bhagavan, without bothering to deny or evade the assumption in the question, replied, 'It happened in the same way that new bodies are created in a dream'.

Madhava Swami had been Bhagavan's attendant for many years. He had started serving Bhagavan in the late 1920s and continued until the early 1940s. In height, size and complexion he was very similar to me. He was also telepathic: if Bhagavan ever wanted anything, Madhava Swami would pick up the thought and produce the desired object.

Although he was constantly in Bhagavan's presence, his mind wandered a lot. He found it hard to meditate and he resented the fact that he had to spend all his time serving Bhagavan in the hall.

When he had first come to the ashram, he had had the idea that he would be able to spend all his time in meditation. Instead, like me, within a week of his arrival, he found himself working full-time as Bhagavan's attendant.

Madhava Swami never enjoyed his work and was always jealous of the devotees who had the freedom to meditate all day. After I myself, with Bhagavan's permission, had moved out of the ashram in order to devote myself full-time to meditation, Madhava Swami came to me to complain about his lot.

'I was with Bhagavan even before you were,' he said. 'Bhagavan has given you your freedom but I still have to work. Bhagavan has not yet given his grace to me so I still have to work.'

Most devotees would have been astonished to hear him talk like this. As an attendant he had the privilege of being near Bhagavan throughout the day. Bhagavan frequently talked to him about spiritual matters and he was one of the few people who was permitted to touch and massage Bhagavan's body. Madhava Swami derived no satisfaction from all this.

He once told me, 'Those devotees who come to Bhagavan's hall think that it is a paradise. But for me Bhagavan's hall is just like hell.'

Madhava Swami openly exhibited a deep disgust for women, especially beautiful ones. When such people came for *darshan* he would say in a loud voice, 'Why are such women coming to see Bhagavan?'

If he ever made comments like this, Bhagavan would reprimand him by saying, 'Why see them as women? Just see your Self.'

Towards the end of his time in the ashram he began to despise all the visitors, both male and female.

He once told Bhagavan, 'If being a *sādhū* means that one should live in a cave and always do meditation, why are all these crowds coming to see Bhagavan?' He had the idea that they all ought to be sitting in their houses meditating.

Bhagavan told him, 'Why do you see these people as "others" and make distinctions? Attend to your serving duties and see your own Self. See the others as forms of God, or see all others as forms of the Self.'

In his early years with Bhagavan he was very peaceful and contented. It was only in the late 1930s that his mind started to

cause him trouble. He eventually became so disturbed that he started to go mad. I remember that on one occasion, when he saw some of the garden workers digging a pit for compost, he became convinced that some people in the ashram were planning to kill him and bury him in this pit.

When he was told that it was only a compost pit he shouted, 'No! No! These people are digging the pit because they want to bury me!'

Madhava Swami eventually resigned his job as attendant and left the ashram. He came back for occasional visits but he spent most of his time on pilgrimages, hoping to find some peace of mind. He never found it. As the years passed his restlessness and his mental instability increased. In the mid-1940s the ashram received a message that Madhava Swami was staying in Kumbakonam and that he was in need of assistance. Bhagavan sent Kunju Swami to see what could be done for him. Kunju Swami was shocked to see how much he had deteriorated both mentally and physically.

He passed on a message which Bhagavan had given him: 'You did service to Bhagavan for many years. You were constantly in his presence. Why have you come here? Why don't you come back to the ashram?'

Madhava Swami was far too afraid to come back and see Bhagavan. He had the idea that his mental problems would increase in Bhagavan's presence.

He told Kunju Swami, 'The glory and the grace of Bhagavan are indescribable. But my *karma* is too much for me. What can I do? I am bearing my *karma* only by the grace of Bhagavan. It is very intense. I have to suffer like this.'

A few months later he committed suicide by eating some poisonous seeds. Kunju Swami, acting on Bhagavan's orders, went to Kumbakonam and made all the funeral arrangements. Fortunately for Madhava Swami, that was not the end of the story. His devotion to Bhagavan enabled him to take birth again as Bhagavan's white peacock.

There were one or two circumstantial indications which convinced many people that Madhava Swami had indeed been reborn as this peacock. Whenever it came to the hall, the peacock would make a point of inspecting all the books on the bookshelves. Looking after the library there was one of Madhava Swami's daily

chores. He also repaired or rebound any books that were damaged. When the peacock came on its inspection tour, it would often peck at the books that Madhava Swami had rebound, but not touch any of the others. Another piece of circumstantial evidence came from the fact that Madhava Swami was something of a misogynist, so much so that he would often make rude remarks when women came into the hall. The peacock retained this trait by refusing to have anything to do with any of the peahens which also lived in the ashram. I have one little story of my own to add to the evidence. When Madhava Swami used to visit my house, he would always sit on a concrete bench near the door. In later years the white peacock also visited me occasionally. Each time it came it would sit in Madhava Swami's place on the bench.

If there is a moral to be gained from this story, I think that it can be found in a brief incident which I witnessed in the ashram. Bhagavan had been trying, unsuccessfully, to make the white peacock sit in a nest which he had specially made for it in the ashram.

When the peacock refused to cooperate, Bhagavan remarked, 'You nearly always ignore my words'.

When a new animal was brought to the ashram, Bhagavan would usually decline to accept it unless a devotee volunteered to look after it. Bhagavan at first was unwilling to accept even Lakshmi and the white peacock. It was only when devotees assured him that they would be well looked after that he agreed to let them stay in the ashram. Some animals which failed to find favour with anyone were returned to the donors. I remember a baby tiger that fell into this category. A devotee from north India brought it to Bhagavan. Even though it was small, it was already rather ferocious. It got angry with everyone except Bhagavan who tried to go near it. Bhagavan put it on his knee and had a photo taken but no one else could control it. After one week, when it became clear that the tiger was not going to settle down, Bhagavan told the owner to take it away.

In addition to the ashram pets and cows there were a number of wild animals which came for Bhagavan's *darshan*. The stories of the monkeys are well known but there is one incident concerning two sparrows which I don't think anyone else has recorded.

One day, two sparrows came and perched on top of the double doors which were then on the south side of the hall. Each sparrow

sat on its own door and looked intently at Bhagavan for a whole day. Neither of them showed any fear when visiting devotees walked in and out of the doorway. Usually the doors to the hall were closed at night, but when the sparrows refused to leave, even after dark, Bhagavan told his attendants to leave the doors open. They stayed throughout the night and departed early the next morning. After they had flown away Bhagavan told us that two *siddha purushas* [perfected beings] had come in the form of the sparrows to have his *darshan*.

*There is a tradition in Tiruvannamalai that there are a number of perfected beings, called siddhas, who live on Arunachala in invisible bodies. There are several other reported instances of Bhagavan saying that one or more of these beings took an animal form and then visited him in order to have his darshan.*

There were other, less exalted sparrows in the neighbourhood. One of them once repeatedly tried to build a nest over Bhagavan's sofa. It never got very far because Madhava Swami kept destroying the nest with a long stick. After several failed attempts, the sparrow flew to the top of the entrance doors, looked at Bhagavan, and repeatedly chirped at him. To the people in the hall it sounded like ordinary bird noise but Bhagavan realised that it was making a complaint.

He turned to Madhava Swami and asked, 'Who has destroyed her nest? She is complaining to me about it.'

'I did,' replied Madhava Swami. 'If it builds its nest on any of the other beams there will be no problem. But there will always be trouble if it constructs directly over the sofa. Grass will always be falling on Bhagavan's head.'

Bhagavan agreed and arranged for two wooden boards to be nailed to the beams in a different corner of the hall. The sparrow was somehow persuaded to rebuild its nest on these new boards. In the absence of any further disturbances, the sparrow laid some eggs and raised a family there. As a final postscript to this story I should mention that one of the baby sparrows once fell out of the nest. Bhagavan gave it some milk and then asked one of the devotees to put it back. The sparrow stayed there for a couple of months. When all its children had learned to fly, it took off one day and never returned.

Bhagavan always became concerned if any of the animals in his

vicinity were injured or discomfited in any way. I was once walking with Bhagavan on the hill in the early morning when a pigeon fell in front of us. It had been attacked by a bigger bird and its head was severely injured. Bhagavan asked me to pick it up and bring it back to the ashram. When we got back to the hall, Bhagavan put it on his lap and massaged the injury with castor oil. From time to time he would also gently blow on the wound. The bird made no objection to this because it was either in a state of shock or unconscious. After Bhagavan's treatment the pigeon made a speedy and almost miraculous recovery. The next day we took it back to the hill and released it. It flew away without exhibiting any signs of the serious injury it had recently suffered.

Bhagavan often fed the ashram animals about an hour after lunch, a time when most devotees were asleep. The squirrels were fed in the hall itself, since most of them lived there, but the other animals were usually fed outside. The monkeys, who were all rather aggressive, always received their food outside. Bhagavan didn't want them to get into the habit of coming inside the hall for food because he knew that their presence disturbed many of the devotees.

Bhagavan used to feed the squirrels in the hall at about 1 p.m. every day. The 10–15 squirrels who lived in and around the hall would always show up around this time and wait for Bhagavan to feed them. They would also show up at other times of the day, especially if they heard Bhagavan opening the tin of nuts that he kept next to his sofa. The squirrels never showed any fear or apprehension while they were with Bhagavan. Even though they were wild animals they would happily run over his legs, arms and head while they were waiting to be fed. This fearlessness once produced a casualty: one squirrel, which ran inside one of Bhagavan's pillows, was either suffocated or crushed to death when Bhagavan inadvertently leaned back on it. Fortunately, accidents like this were very rare.

Bhagavan's compassion towards animals did not extend to all the members of the insect kingdom, for he seemed quite happy to permit insects to be killed if they were causing a nuisance.

One morning, for example, shortly before lunch, Bhagavan noticed that a large number of black ants were entering the hall through the drainage hole.

*Indian stone or cement floors are regularly washed with water. In such rooms there will be a small drainage hole, about an inch in diameter, at the junction of one of the walls and the floor. Many floors are slightly tilted so that water naturally drains towards this hole.*

Turning to me Bhagavan said, 'Find out where these ants are coming from. If there is a nest in there, block up the exit so that the ants cannot come into the hall. You must do this work quickly because all the devotees will be coming back at 3 p.m.'

I prised out the flagstone that the drainage hole was on. As I pulled the stone out of the wall (a few inches of it were embedded there) I saw a large colony of black ants living in a hole behind it. The ants reacted to their discovery by pouring out into the hall. Some of them even started to swarm over Bhagavan's sofa. There were so many on the floor around my feet that I couldn't have taken a step without killing some of them. Bhagavan noticed that I had been immobilised by my fear of unnecessarily killing any ants.

'Why are you just standing there and looking at them?' asked Bhagavan. 'You must close up the hole before the devotees come back. Tell me what you need to finish the job properly. Whatever you need—mud, water, bricks—tell me and I shall bring it for you.'

As I was much too worried about killing some of the ants to give Bhagavan an answer, Bhagavan repeated his offer: 'Tell me what you want and I shall go and fetch it for you. Shall I bring some broken bricks and a little cement?'

This time I managed to explain my inactivity.

'There are ants everywhere, Bhagavan. I cannot move or do any work without killing some of them.'

Bhagavan dismissed my excuse. 'What is sin?' he asked. 'Is it you who are doing this? You are doing something that is for the good of everyone. If you give up the idea "I am doing this," then you will not have any trouble. This is not something that you have decided to do yourself. You are only doing this because I am asking you to do it.'

Bhagavan could sense that I was still reluctant to tread on any of the ants so he tried a different approach.

'In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Krishna asked Arjuna to kill his enemies. When Arjuna hesitated Krishna explained that he had

already decided that these people were to die. Arjuna would be merely the tool which would carry out the divine will. Likewise, because I am telling you to do this work, no *pāpam* [the karmic consequences of performing immoral acts] will come to you.'

When Bhagavan had given me this assurance I filled in the hole with bricks and cement. Many ants died in the process.

I discovered later that Bhagavan generally discouraged devotees from killing insects unless they were causing, or about to cause, injury or suffering to people or animals. However, if they *were* causing a problem, he had no compunction about killing them. I once saw Bhagavan take unni [blood-sucking insects] off one of the ashram dogs and kill them by throwing them into the burning charcoal in his *kumutti*.

A devotee who was watching asked, 'Is it not a sin to kill insects like this?'

Ramaswami Pillai, who used to take insects off dogs and kill them in the same way, justified the activity by telling a story about Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

'It seems,' he said, 'that one of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's devotees was wondering whether it was a sin to kill bedbugs. He went to ask Sri Ramakrishna about this. When he got there he found Sri Ramakrishna killing the bedbugs in his own bed. The devotee's question was thus answered by a direct demonstration.'

Bhagavan did not answer the questioner himself, but when Ramaswami Pillai had completed his story he nodded his head and said 'Yes'.

On another occasion when a visitor maintained that one should not kill any kind of insect life, Bhagavan replied, 'If you cook and cut vegetables, you cannot avoid killing a few insects. If you think that killing worms is a sin, then you cannot eat vegetables.'

If Bhagavan saw people deliberately killing harmless insects he would usually show some sign of disapproval. One day, for example, a small brahmin boy came to the hall and began to catch and kill flies just to amuse himself. He would clap his hands together and squash the flies between his palms.

Bhagavan told him, 'Don't attack the flies like this. It is a sin.'

Unperturbed, the boy replied with what he thought was a telling counter-argument: 'You have killed a six-foot-long tiger and you are sitting on the skin. Is this not also a sin?'

Bhagavan laughed and let the matter drop.

*Other people occasionally asked Bhagavan why he chose to sit on a tiger skin. Most of them felt that he was condoning the killing of tigers by sitting on their skins. Bhagavan would usually reply that the skins had come to the ashram as unsolicited gifts, and that he had not asked that any tigers be killed on his behalf.*

*Bhagavan strongly opposed the killing of all the higher life-forms. He gave orders that even snakes and scorpions should not be killed in the ashram. The general rule seemed to be: insects could be killed if they were causing pain or were potentially harmful, but all higher forms of life, including dangerous and poisonous animals, were sacrosanct.*

Mosquitoes were a perpetual problem for most devotees. Bhagavan never criticised devotees if they swatted mosquitoes which were biting them. In the 1940s he even permitted the cowshed to be sprayed with pesticides so that the cows would not be troubled by biting insects. However, if he was questioned about the moral aspects of killing mosquitoes he would usually answer by saying that one should not identify with the body that is being bitten.     ✱

One devotee who asked him about this got the following reply: 'If you were to take your complaint against mosquitoes to a court of law, the mosquitoes would win the case. Their *dharma* [the rules that they must live by] is to bite and sting. They are teaching you that you are not the body. You object to their stings only because you identify with the body.'

# Ashram Life

## Reprimanding attendants and workers

Bhagavan's attendants were always selected and recruited by Chinnaswami. To the best of my knowledge Bhagavan never asked anyone to be his attendant, nor did he ever try to get rid of any of the attendants who were given to him. People occasionally volunteered to do the job but their services were never accepted. It became an ashram tradition that Bhagavan's attendants should always be young unmarried men.

Once, when a woman who was a qualified nurse from North India volunteered to be an attendant, Bhagavan replied by saying, 'Ask the people in the hall'.

Krishnaswami, the chief attendant, and some of the other people in the hall objected.

'No! No! We cannot have ladies doing service to Bhagavan. It is not proper.'

Bhagavan turned to the woman and said, 'These people all think like this. What can I do?'

Bhagavan was a stern taskmaster who always insisted that the jobs in the ashram be done properly and punctually. As a result, the attendants, who worked under his constant supervision, frequently found themselves on the receiving end of Bhagavan's critical comments. Bhagavan rarely got angry with anyone, but when he did, it was usually because of some lapse by one of his attendants.

In Krishnaswami's early days at the ashram Bhagavan once got very angry with him because he refused to chase the monkeys out of the hall. The local monkeys, knowing that many people came to the hall with offerings of fruit, used to sit nearby and try to steal the fruit from unsuspecting visitors. Bhagavan discouraged devotees from feeding the monkeys near the hall because he didn't want them to get into the habit of waiting there for food. Although Bhagavan sometimes laughed when monkeys managed to steal a banana or a mango, he also got angry with his attendants when the monkeys made successful raids in the hall. Bhagavan frequently reprimanded Krishnaswami for not chasing away the monkeys and for allowing them to come into the hall.

Finally Bhagavan told him, 'It seems that you are not prepared to listen to anything that I say. You will only do your job properly if Chinnaswami comes and tells you what to do.'

angry with his attendants when the monkeys made successful raids in the hall. Bhagavan frequently reprimanded Krishnaswami for not chasing away the monkeys and for allowing them to come into the hall.

Finally Bhagavan told him, 'It seems that you are not prepared to listen to anything that I say. You will only do your job properly if Chinnaswami comes and shouts at you.'

Bhagavan then reported the matter to Chinnaswami, who promptly gave Krishnaswami a strong lecture on the necessity of discharging his duties properly. After that, Krishnaswami became a zealous monkey chaser. He kept a catapult in the hall and chased the monkeys at the slightest provocation.

There was another attendant called Rangaswami who also went through a period of inattentiveness. After he had been doing service in the hall for some time he stopped paying attention to his duties and started to meditate instead. He didn't even care about the monkeys. When visitors placed their fruit offerings near Bhagavan the monkeys were able to steal them without any fear of being molested because Rangaswami, the man who was supposed to be guarding the fruit, would be sitting on the floor with his eyes closed.

Bhagavan tolerated this behaviour for a few days but he eventually rebuked him by saying, 'If you want to meditate like this, go somewhere else. If you want to live here you must do service like everyone else. Meditation is contained in your service to the Guru.'

Rangaswami realised his mistake and went back to discharging his duties again.

On another occasion Bhagavan got very angry with him for telling a lie. While Rangaswami was tuning the radio in the hall he turned one of the knobs in such a way that the radio stopped functioning.

Instead of owning up to Bhagavan that he had broken it, he told him, 'It seems that someone has broken the radio'.

Later that day Rangaswami secretly confessed to me that he had broken the radio and lied to Bhagavan about it. I had a strong feeling that Bhagavan ought to be told the truth so I

went to hall and told Bhagavan what Rangaswami had said to me.

Bhagavan reacted by exclaiming angrily, 'He is telling lies even to me! I should not even look at his face!'

Bhagavan carried out his threat by ignoring the unfortunate Rangaswami for the rest of the day.

Bhagavan would also sometimes get angry if his attendants were very careless. Vaikunta Vas, one of the later attendants, once aroused Bhagavan's wrath by accidentally burning his leg. It was about 9 p.m. and Vaikunta Vas was a little sleepy as a result of eating too much food at the evening meal. He absent-mindedly applied a hot water bottle to Bhagavan's legs without bothering to check the temperature. The water in the bottle was much too hot. Bhagavan winced with pain, got angry with him, and ordered him out of the hall. Vaikunta Vas was so mortified by his mistake that he left the ashram immediately and went back to his village near Pondicherry.

Bhagavan's strictness, and his insistence on absolute obedience, were only manifested towards those who worked in the ashram full-time. If visitors committed mistakes he would rarely take them to task. There was a doctor from Madras called Srinivasa Rao who once got permission to massage Bhagavan's feet and legs. Usually, only attendants were allowed to do this job, but on certain occasions some of the older devotees were also permitted to do it.

Bhagavan told this doctor, 'Rub from the knees down to the ankle, not the other way round,' but the doctor ignored his instructions.

Thinking that his medical knowledge was superior to Bhagavan's, he insisted on massaging in the opposite direction. Bhagavan made no complaint but after a few minutes he told the doctor, 'Enough!'

After the doctor had left the hall Bhagavan remarked, 'Because he is a doctor, he doesn't want to listen to my advice. What he was saying, and his method of massaging, were not correct.'

Bhagavan allowed this man to continue with the massage because he was an outsider. If one of his attendants had tried to behave like this, in a way that was so contrary to his wishes, he would have been rewarded with an immediate rebuke from Bhagavan.

Bhagavan would also occasionally get angry with other ashram

workers if they deliberately disobeyed him. There was an office worker called Mauni Srinivasa Rao who once incurred Bhagavan's displeasure by trying to override his instructions. One of Mauni Srinivasa Rao's jobs was to draft replies to all the spiritual queries which came to the ashram by post. These first drafts would be shown to Bhagavan, who would then scrutinise them and make all necessary corrections. On one occasion Mauni Srinivasa Rao refused to accept that Bhagavan's corrections were definitive. He corrected Bhagavan's alterations and sent the letter back to the hall. Bhagavan went through the letter for the second time, deleting all the corrections which had been added by Mauni Srinivasa Rao. When the letter went back to the office, Mauni Srinivasa Rao again altered some of Bhagavan's corrections. He brought the new draft to the hall and tried to get Bhagavan to read it, but Bhagavan refused even to look at it.

Instead he threw the letter at Mauni Srinivasa Rao and said, very angrily, 'You do whatever you like!'

Sometimes Bhagavan showed his displeasure in more subtle ways. One night, after the evening meal, there was a big quarrel in the dining room which resulted in Subramaniam Swami hitting Krishnaswami in the face. Krishnaswami immediately went and complained to Bhagavan but Bhagavan appeared to take no interest in the matter.

Someone had paid for a big *bhikshā* for the following day, which meant a lot of work for everyone in the kitchen. Ordinarily Bhagavan would have come to the kitchen at 3 a.m. to help Subramaniam to cut the vegetables but that morning he remained in the hall and made Subramaniam do all the work by himself. Subramaniam spent the first two hours wondering why Bhagavan was late but eventually he realised that he was being punished for attacking Krishnaswami. Bhagavan confirmed his theory by refusing to talk to him, or even look at him, for the rest of that day.

### **Ramakrishna Swami**

Ramakrishna Swami, one of the ashram's workers, used to do shopping for the ashram in town. His trips to town were so regular that he managed to start an affair with a woman who lived on one of the masons' streets. The woman was an ashram worker too so he was also able to see her during the day. Since it was impossible

to keep something like this a secret, the woman's family soon discovered what was going on. They told Ramakrishna Swami that they would beat him up if he didn't pay them Rs. 1,000. The threat was never carried out but Ramakrishna Swami got such a bad name that he left town and went to live in Kumbakonam. After a few months, when he thought that the anger of the girl's family might have diminished, he secretly came back to Tiruvannamalai. Because he was still scared of the woman's family, when he reached the edge of town he walked in an anticlockwise direction around the *giri pradakshina* route to avoid passing through town. He was still too embarrassed to go directly to the ashram. Instead, he went and stayed in Kunju Swami's hut in Palakottu.

*Pilgrims performing giri pradakshina always walk clockwise around the hill. A portion of the eight-mile route passes through the town of Tiruvannamalai. By taking a six mile anti-clockwise walk around the hill, Ramakrishna Swami avoided the two mile section which passes through town.*

He stayed there for several days, unsuccessfully trying to summon up enough courage to go and face Bhagavan. Eventually, Bhagavan himself came to the hut and asked Ramakrishna Swami to come with him to the ashram. There, much to everyone's surprise, instead of criticising him, he asked him to work in the hall for a while as one of his attendants.

Some of the devotees who thought that Ramakrishna Swami had brought a bad name to the ashram disapproved of the appointment. Though they were too polite to mention their feelings, Bhagavan could feel their disapproval. In order to mollify them, Bhagavan explained his conduct.

'Before, when he was working here, he spent a lot of his time outside the ashram on ashram business. He never came to *pārāyana*, nor did he ever listen to the teachings in the hall. His mind was always extroverted because he was not doing any meditation. If we keep him in the hall for some time his mind will improve.'

Bhagavan paused before adding a final comment: 'His case has come out into the open. But what other people did, and are still doing, has not come out like this.'

### **Gandhi's visit**

In the 1930s Mahatma Gandhi came to Tiruvannamalai to

make a political speech. Since the organizers had selected a piece of open ground about 400 yards from the ashram as the location for the event, many people in the ashram had hopes that the Mahatma would also pay a call on Bhagavan. When the day of the speech came, I, along with many other devotees, waited at the ashram gate in the hope of catching a glimpse of Gandhi as he drove past. When he finally passed us he was very easy to spot because he was being driven to the meeting in an open car. Rajagopalachari, a leading Congress politician who had organised this South Indian speaking tour, was sitting next to Gandhi in the car. As the car was moving very slowly I ran alongside it and saluted Gandhi by putting my palms together above my head. To my astonishment and delight Gandhi returned my greeting by making the same gesture. The car stopped for a few moments near the ashram gate but it started again when Rajagopalachari gestured to the driver that he should drive on and not enter the ashram.

*Rajagopalachari later became chief minister of the Madras Presidency, a region that included most of South India. After independence he became the first Indian to hold the office of Governor-general.*

One of the ashram's residents, T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, went to the meeting and presented Gandhi with two books: *Aksharamanamālai* and *Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. As he was presenting the books he quoted a verse from *Aksharamanamālai*: 'O Arunachala! Gem of awareness, shining in all creatures low or high, destroy the meanness in my heart.' Gandhi auctioned the books and gave the proceeds to a harijan welfare fund.

*Aksharamanamālai is a long poem by Bhagavan in praise of Arunachala. Ramana Sannidhi Murai, written by Muruganar, is a collection of poems which praise Bhagavan.*

After the meeting was over I went to the hall and told Bhagavan the story of how Gandhi had greeted me on the road. I also mentioned that Rajagopalachari had made the driver go straight to the meeting, thus denying Gandhi a chance to make a brief visit to the ashram. Bhagavan replied with a very interesting comment.

'Gandhi would like to come here but Rajagopalachari was

worried about the consequences. Because he knows that Gandhi is an advanced soul, he fears that he might go into *samādhi* here and forget all about politics. That is why he gestured to the driver to drive on.'

A few days later, when Gandhi was in Madras, Krishnaswami went to see him and managed to get an interview with him. When he introduced himself to Gandhi as a resident of Sri Ramanasramam, Gandhi remarked, 'I would love to come and see Bhagavan but I don't know when the time will come'.

### Stray verses

I once asked Bhagavan, 'What are the most important verses in *Kaivalya Navanītam*?' I gave my copy of the book to Bhagavan who immediately picked out verses twelve and thirteen from chapter one:

Look here my son! He who has forgotten his true nature is alternately born and dies, turning round and round in the unceasing wheel of time, like a feather caught up in a whirlwind, until he realises the true nature of the Self. If he comes to see the individual self and its substratum, the Self, then he becomes the substratum, which is *Brahman*, and escapes rebirths. Should you know yourself, no harm will befall you. As you have asked I have told you this.

After reading them out Bhagavan remarked, 'All the other verses in *Kaivalyam* are just an elaboration and a commentary on these two verses'.

*In the English translation of this work, published by Sri Ramanasramam, the numbering of the verses has been changed. These verses from chapter one are numbered nineteen and twenty in this edition.*

*Bhagavan must have made similar comments to other people. Munagala Venkataramiah, the editor and translator of the Ramanasramam edition, has put a note under these verses which reads, 'The teaching is complete at this point'.*

On another occasion, when I asked Bhagavan to select some reading material for me, he gave me a short-list of six books: *Kaivalya Navanītam*, *Ribhu Gītā*, *Ashtāvakra Gītā*, *Ellām Ondrē*, *Swarūpa Sāram* and *Yōga Vāsishṭa*.

He laid particular stress on *Ellām Ondrē*, telling me, 'If you want *mōksha* write, read and practise the instructions in *Ellām Ondrē*'.

*The Ribhu Gītā is a Sanskrit text which appears in a work called Siva Rahasya. The book which was read and studied at Sri Ramanasramam was a Tamil translation of this. Ashtāvakra Gītā is a vedantic text, attributed to the sage Ashtavakra, which was compiled about the same time as the later Upanishads. Swarūpa Sāram contains the teachings of Swarupananda, a 17th century Tamil Guru. Ellām Ondrē is an obscure 19th century Tamil text on advaita, similar in style to Ribhu Gītā. Kaivalya Navanītam is a Tamil work on advaita, and Yōga Vāsishtha is a Sanskrit work in which the sage Vasishtha passes on his advaitic teachings to Lord Rama.*

In February 1938 I persuaded Bhagavan to write a short Tamil verse on *advaita*. My request arose out of the following talk which was given by Bhagavan in the hall.

'*Advaita* [non-duality] should not be practised in ordinary activities. It is sufficient if there is no differentiation in the mind. If one keeps cart-loads of discriminating thoughts within, one should not pretend that all is one on the outside.

'Westerners practise mixed marriages and eat equally with everyone. What is the use of doing only this? Only wars and battlefields have resulted. Out of all these activities, who has obtained any happiness?

'This world is a huge theatre. Each person has to act whatever role is assigned to him. It is the nature of the universe to be differentiated but within each person there should be no sense of differentiation.'

I was so moved by this brief speech that I asked Bhagavan to summarise these ideas in a written Tamil verse. Bhagavan agreed, took a Sanskrit verse from *Tattvōpadēsa* [verse 87] which expresses a similar idea, and translated it into a Tamil *venbā*.

*Tattvōpadēsa is a philosophical work attributed to Adi-Sankaracharya. A venbā is a Tamil verse form which consists of three lines of four feet and one line of three feet.*

When he was satisfied with his translation I also managed to

persuade him to write the first fair copy in my diary. The verse, which is given below, was eventually published as verse thirty-nine of *Ulladu Nārpadu Anubāndham*.

O Son, always experience non-duality [*advaita*] in the Heart, but do not at any time put non-duality into action. Non-duality is fit [to be expressed] in the three worlds [of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, but] know that non-duality is not fit [to be expressed] with the Guru.

Verse twenty-nine of the same work was also written at my request. One day I asked Bhagavan, 'If one attains *jnāna*, what indications will there be that one has reached the spiritual goal?' Bhagavan replied by composing the following verse:

Know that the power of intellect and lustre will automatically increase in those who have known the reality, just as the trees on this earth shine forth with all qualities such as beauty as soon as spring comes.

*This is not an original composition. It is a Tamil translation of a verse (book 5,76.20) from Yōga Vāsishtha.*

A few years later I was on my way to see Bhagavan when Mauni Srinivasa Rao called me and said, 'Some copies of *Bhagavad Gītā Sāraṁ* have just come from the printers'.

Chinnaswami gave me a free copy which I took to the hall and showed to Bhagavan. As Bhagavan was going through the booklet he noticed that the last verse had been inadvertently omitted. He wrote the verse in the appropriate place before returning the booklet to me. As I was sitting in the hall reading the verses, a woman called Venamma, who was Echammal's sister, noticed that Bhagavan had written this missing verse in my copy. She got a copy of the book for herself, went up to Bhagavan and requested him to write the missing verse in her book as well.

Bhagavan put on a stern look and pretended that he was angry with me.

'I was sitting still like Siva,' he said. 'Why did you give this book to me and make me write in it? This is your fault. If I write for this woman, all the other women in the hall will make me write for them as well. All this has happened because you made me write this verse.'

Bhagavan's version of how I forced him to write in my book was so at variance with the facts, I knew he was only showing

anger in order to avoid having to write verses in all the hundreds of defective books. His outburst had the desired effect because none of the other devotees in the hall dared to approach him with their copies.

### Arunachala

Bhagavan sometimes called Arunachala 'The medicine mountain'. He used to say, 'For all ailments of body and mind *giri pradakshina* is good medicine'.

In order to get people to sample this medicine, he often prescribed a daily *pradakshina* for those *sādhus* who spent most of their time sitting in meditation. He told them that doing *pradakshina* once a day was a good way to keep the mind in *sattva guna* [a quiet harmonious state].

Bhagavan once expounded on the greatness of Arunachala by comparing it to a famous mountain in the *Rāmāyana*.

'When Rama, Lakshmana and their army entered Lanka,' he said, 'Indrajit, the son of Ravana, launched a very powerful arrow against them. The arrow caused even Rama and Lakshmana to lose consciousness. Everyone in the army except Hanuman became unconscious. Hanuman went back to India and returned with a whole mountain which contained the healing herb *sanjīvini*. When the air which had touched this herb touched Rama, Lakshmana and their army, they were all awakened and healed.'

Bhagavan concluded his story by saying, 'This Arunachala mountain is more powerful than that mountain'.

Occasionally, when devotees asked Bhagavan about the greatness of the hill he would sit in silence. These exhibitions of *mauna* [silence] were his answers to the questions. At other times he was more willing to talk. In March 1938, in answer to a visitor's query, he gave a brief summary of some of the scriptural stories about Arunachala.

'The greatness of this hill has been spoken of by different people in many different ways. In the *Purāṇas* [scriptures dealing mainly with mythology] it is said that the inside of this Arunachala is in the form of a cave. It is also said that many *siddhas* [accomplished or perfected yogis] and ascetics live there. Guru Namasivaya has sung about the greatness of this hill. In one of his verses he says that the mountain summons those who are inten-

sively practising *jnāna-tapas*. When Ambal, the consort of Siva, was performing *tapas* at Annamalai [one of the Tamil names for Arunachala], the buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura came and spoke to her.

“Why don’t you marry me?” he asked. “What happiness have you found by doing *tapas*?”

‘When Ambal turned him down he became violent. Ambal immediately transformed herself into Durga, the fearsome form of Ambal, merely by wishing that the change would take place. This transformation frightened Mahishasura so much that he decided to return home and gather his army before engaging in a fight. Ambal, who knew his plans, sent him the *Hitōpadēsa* through Saruga Muni.’

*Hitōpadēsa is a small treatise containing advice for Mahishasura. The word means ‘good advice’.*

As this *Hitopadēsa* was only available in Sanskrit, I requested Bhagavan to write it in Tamil. Bhagavan graciously made a partial translation by composing the following verse:

This holy place [Arunachala] is ever the abode of righteous people and devotees. Here base people who intend harm to others will perish, being afflicted with many diseases, and the power of the wicked will be lost in a second without leaving a trace. Therefore do not fall into the fierce fire of the anger of Lord Arunachala whose form is a hill of fire.

Bhagavan concluded his lesson by telling us, ‘Who can really speak about the greatness of Arunachala?’

*Over the years Bhagavan translated a total of seven verses from Sri Arunāchala Māhātmyam [The Greatness of Arunachala], the Sanskrit work which is the major scriptural source of stories about Arunachala. All seven are printed together in Five Hymns to Arunachala, pp. 18–19.*

A few months later Bhagavan spoke again about the greatness of Arunachala: ‘This hill is not one which was formed at a certain time and which will be destroyed at another time. It is a *swayambū* [spontaneously manifesting] *lingam*. The word *lingam* can be subdivided: “*ling*” means “union” and “*gam*” means “that which

forms". There are many other meanings for the word such as God, *Ātman*, form, and Siva.'

*Swayambū lingams appear spontaneously as an act of God. They are not created or caused by any human or geologically-natural activity.*

'This hill is not really on earth. All the heavenly bodies are attached to it. The name of that which is the source of both arising and subsiding is *lingam*.'

While Bhagavan was reminiscing in this way he commented on some other puranic stories.

'The stories in the *Purāṇas* say that God collects the dust of the feet of his devotees in a box. Then, wrapping this dust in silk, he is said to do *pūjā* to it. He does so to show that he is the devotee of his devotees. He says, "I praise him who praises me in this world".'

### **Lakshmana Sharma**

In the late 1920s Bhagavan asked Lakshmana Sharma, one of his scholarly devotees, if he had studied *Ulladu Nārpadu*. Lakshmana Sharma replied, 'No Bhagavan, the Tamil is too difficult for me'.

*Ulladu Nārpadu is a poem of forty-two verses, composed by Bhagavan in Tamil, which explains the nature of reality and the means of discovering it.*

*Although Lakshmana Sharma was a Tamilian himself, he was not familiar with all the grammatical rules of literary Tamil. Colloquial and literary Tamil have different grammatical structures. The differences are so marked that even educated Tamils who have not studied the rules of classical written Tamil have difficulty in understanding literary texts.*

Since Bhagavan thought that Lakshmana Sharma ought to be acquainted with the work, he offered to explain it to him, line by line. Each day in the weeks that followed Lakshmana Sharma had the rare privilege of having private lessons from Bhagavan. He took notes as Bhagavan explained the meaning of each verse and later used the information Bhagavan imparted to write a Tamil commentary on the work.

*To ensure that he had correctly understood the meaning, Lakshmana Sharma translated each verse into Sanskrit. Bhagavan checked these translations so thoroughly that he often made Lakshmana Sharma rewrite them five or six times. These Sanskrit verses and an English translation of them were later published under the title Revelation. Lakshmana Sharma's original Tamil commentary is still in print but it has never been published in English.*

This commentary was initially serialised in a newspaper called *Jana Mittiran*, appearing once a week. When the relevant issues of this paper arrived in the ashram, Bhagavan would cut out the commentary and keep it near his sofa.

Lakshmana Sharma wanted the ashram to print the commentary in book form but Chinnaswami refused because he and Lakshmana Sharma had previously had a few disputes about other matters. Lakshmana Sharma eventually had to publish the book himself.

Bhagavan almost never interfered in the day-to-day business affairs of the ashram office, but when he heard that Chinnaswami had refused to print this book he made an exception. He went to Chinnaswami's room and looked in at him through the window for a period of about fifteen minutes. Chinnaswami didn't notice him because he was busy checking some accounts. Eventually, some devotees had to come and tell him that Bhagavan had been standing outside his window for a long time.

When Chinnaswami finally stood up to greet Bhagavan, Bhagavan said, 'Everyone is saying that Lakshmana Sharma's commentary on *Ulladu Nārpadu* is the best. Nobody has studied *Ulladu Nārpadu* the way Sharma has. Why don't you publish his book?'

Chinnaswami accepted the 'hint'. He agreed to publish the book as an ashram publication as soon as Lakshmana Sharma's private edition went out of print. In the meantime he purchased most of Lakshmana Sharma's unsold copies, pasted Sri Ramanasramam's name over the name and address of the original publisher, and sold the book in the ashram bookstore.

### **Minor thefts**

In the early 1930s there were so few people in the ashram that

the old hall was often empty. Once, when Bhagavan went for a bath, a thief walked into the old hall, which was deserted at the time, and stole Bhagavan's glasses. These glasses which had gold rims had been given to him by a devotee.

When the theft was discovered Bhagavan remarked critically to his attendant, 'They were stolen because you left the door open'.

From that time on, until the crowds started to come in the mid-1930s, the old hall was always locked when Bhagavan went out.

Although Bhagavan himself was unattached to material possessions—he often said that his only possessions were his stick and his water pot—he frequently cautioned us to guard against thieves. He particularly advised us to keep our rooms locked whenever we were not in them. He set a good example by closing the front gate of the ashram himself at about 9 p.m. In those days the main gate was near the big iluppai tree, not next to the road. For some time in the 1930s the resident devotees got into the habit of sitting outside this gate every evening. At 9 p.m. Bhagavan would come and close the gate even if he could see that we were all still sitting outside. At first I used to wonder why Bhagavan was behaving like this. Later I came to understand that he was giving us a gentle reminder that gates ought to be closed at night.

Although Bhagavan encouraged us to deter thieves from stealing our property, he was generally very lenient if thieves were apprehended inside the ashram. I can recollect two incidents in which Bhagavan allowed thieves to go unpunished. The first occasion was when our watchman caught a man fishing in Pali Teertham at night with a big net. Such activities were not allowed in those days. The culprit turned out to be a man called Chinna who owned an acre of land near the ashram's cowshed.

When the watchman brought Chinna before Bhagavan and said that he wanted to take him to the police station because he had caught him fishing in the tank, Bhagavan said, 'Let him go, it is only our Chinna'.

The other theft occurred in broad daylight. A devotee called Somasundaram Swami caught a man stealing mangoes from one of our trees. They had a brief quarrel which culminated in Somasundaram Swami physically propelling the thief into Bhagavan's presence. When Bhagavan was informed about the theft he told Somasundaram Swami to let the man go free.

The next day a big parcel of ripe mangoes arrived in the hall.

On one of the mangoes someone had put a label which said 'Ramana Bhagavan'.

Accompanying the parcel was a note which requested Bhagavan to eat the mango which had the label on. The other mangoes were intended for the devotees in the ashram.

When Bhagavan saw the mangoes, the label and the note, he turned to Somasundaram Swami and said: 'Yesterday you were fighting over what you thought were our mangoes. But look, our mangoes were really growing in a different place. See! They even have our name printed on them.'

### **Ramanatha Brahmachari**

Ramanatha Brahmachari first came to Bhagavan in the days when Bhagavan was living in Virupaksha Cave. He had a very distinctive appearance because he was very short, wore thick glasses, and always covered his body with a large amount of *vibhūti*. In the Virupaksha days he used to go for *bhikshā* in town. He would bring whatever food he had managed to beg to Virupaksha Cave, serve it to Bhagavan, and then afterwards eat whatever remained.

One day, as he was bringing some food to Bhagavan, he met his father on the hill. He was sitting outside Guhai Namasivaya Temple about halfway between the town and Virupaksha Cave. His father said that he was very hungry and asked for some of the food which his son had begged.

Ramanatha Brahmachari, thinking that it would be improper and disrespectful to feed anyone, even his own father, before Bhagavan had received his share, told his father, 'Come with me to Bhagavan. We can share the food there.'

His father, who had no interest in Bhagavan, refused to come. He asked his son to give him some food and then leave, but Ramanatha Brahmachari refused.

Bhagavan had been observing all this from Virupaksha Cave. When Ramanatha Brahmachari finally arrived there Bhagavan told him, 'I will not take any of your food unless you first serve your father'.

Ramanatha Brahmachari went back to Guhai Namasivaya Temple, but instead of following Bhagavan's instructions he again asked his father to come and eat with Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave. When his father, for the second time, refused to come,

Ramanatha Brahmachari went back to Virupaksha Cave without giving him any food.

Bhagavan again told him, this time more firmly, 'I will only eat if you feed your father first. Go and feed him.'

This time Ramanatha obeyed the order, fed his father and returned to Virupaksha Cave with the remaining food. I mention this story only because it shows how great his devotion to Bhagavan was and how little he cared about anything else, including his own family.

Ramanatha Brahmachari used to feed Bhagavan with such love and devotion that Bhagavan felt that he had been captured by his love. That is why Bhagavan said on one occasion, 'I am only afraid of two devotees, Ramanatha Brahmachari and Mudaliar Patti'. It was not physical fear, it was more a feeling of helplessness. If a devotee has a strong, burning love for his Guru, the Guru is compelled to do anything that the devotee asks. Bhagavan always felt apprehensive whenever Ramanatha Brahmachari appeared because he knew that he would be unable to resist any of his requests. Ramakrishna Paramahansa once expressed the same idea when he said: 'When you have attained ecstatic love you have found the rope to tie God with.'

A few years after the ashram moved to the foot of the hill, Chinnaswami and Ramanatha Brahmachari had some sort of quarrel. I don't know what it was all about but the end result was that Ramanatha Brahmachari was banned from eating or sleeping in the ashram. An advocate in town called Neelakanta Sastri came to his rescue by volunteering to feed him.

He told Ramanatha Brahmachari, 'Don't worry about your food. From now on you can come to my house every day. I have photos of Bhagavan and Vinayaka. If you do a daily *pūjā* to both of these pictures I will give you morning tiffin and lunch in my house. You can also take whatever is left over from lunch in a tiffin carrier to eat as your evening meal.'

After his exclusion from the ashram Ramanatha Brahmachari built himself a tiny hut in Palakottu. He had been attracted to some of Gandhi's ideas even while Bhagavan was still living on the hill. In addition to spinning cotton, a must for all Gandhians in those days, he had a great attraction to the idea of service. When he moved to Palakottu he performed *sēvā* [service] by cleaning the huts of all the *sādhus* who lived there and by doing all their

shopping for them. Before he went to town he would ask everyone in Palakottu whether they needed anything. Invariably he would return with whatever had been requested. Because of all these activities Kunju Swami gave him the nickname 'Palakottu *Sarvādhikāri*' [The Supreme Ruler of Palakottu].

Ramanatha Brahmachari was willing to do anything for the Palakottu *sādhus*. Some people took advantage of this by giving him trivial or unpleasant tasks to complete but he never complained. In performing all his tasks with humbleness and joy, and in serving Bhagavan with great love and devotion, he was an outstanding example of what a good devotee ought to be.

### **Different *sādhana*s**

I was once told a story about some village people who came to Bhagavan for spiritual advice. They asked him what the most direct path to liberation was. Bhagavan, as usual, told them that self-enquiry was the most effective spiritual technique. One of Ganapati Muni's disciples who was present in the hall went to see Ganapati Muni and told him about this incident.

Ganapati Muni apparently said, 'How can people like this understand and practise self-enquiry? If they had come to me for advice I would have given them some *nama-japa* [repetition of the name of God] to do.'

When Bhagavan heard about this remark he told the people in the hall: 'When people ask me about meditation I always give them the best advice. That is, I tell them to do self-enquiry. If I tell them to follow some other method I am cheating them by giving them inferior advice. Let him give people *japa* if he wants to. I shall carry on giving the best advice by telling people to take up self-enquiry.'

Although Bhagavan demonstrated the truth of this statement by advising most of his visitors to follow the path of self-enquiry, there were a few occasions when he prescribed other techniques. He once gave a harijan devotee a mantra to repeat and on a few occasions he told visitors to repeat some or all of the poems that he had written about Arunachala.

When one group of villagers who had just been given *Arunāchala Stuti Panchakam* [Bhagavan's five poems about Arunachala]

to recite left the hall, a devotee asked, 'How can such uneducated people understand the literary Tamil in these poems?'

'They don't have to understand the meaning,' replied Bhagavan, 'they will get some benefit from merely repeating the verses.'

I can think of another similar case. Whenever Echammal's granddaughter came to see Bhagavan, he would ask her to read out loud *Upadēsa Undiyār* [a thirty-verse philosophical work by Bhagavan in Tamil]. If she made any mistakes Bhagavan would correct her pronunciation.

Since she seemed to be a rather worldly girl I once asked Bhagavan, 'This girl does not look as if she has any desire for *jñāna*. Why do you ask her to repeat *Upadēsa Undiyār* each time she comes?'

Bhagavan explained: 'In future, when troubles come to her, the remembrance of these verses will help her.'

This girl is now an old woman. When I saw her a few months ago—we had not seen each other for many years—I reminded her about these lessons that Bhagavan had given her.

She told me, 'The verses have stayed in my memory all my life, but it is only recently, by the grace of Bhagavan, that I have begun to understand their meaning.'

### Self-correction

Bhagavan taught that one should reform oneself rather than find fault with others. In practical terms this means that one should find the source of one's own mind rather than make complaints about other people's minds and actions. I can remember a typical reply that Bhagavan gave on this subject.

A devotee, who was quite intimate with Bhagavan, asked him, 'Some of the devotees who live with Bhagavan behave very strangely. They seem to do many things that Bhagavan does not approve of. Why does Bhagavan not correct them?'

Bhagavan replied, 'Correcting oneself is correcting the whole world. The sun is simply bright. It does not correct anyone. Because it shines the whole world is full of light. Transforming yourself is a means of giving light to the whole world.'

Once, while I was sitting in the hall, someone complained to Bhagavan about one of the devotees who was sitting there: 'He is not meditating here, he is just sleeping.'

‘How do you know?’ retorted Bhagavan. ‘Only because you yourself gave up your meditation to look at him. First see yourself and don’t concern yourself with other people’s habits.’

Bhagavan sometimes used to say: ‘Some people who come here have two aims: they want Bhagavan to be perfect and they want the ashram to be perfect. To achieve this goal they make all kinds of complaints and suggestions. They don’t come here to correct themselves, they only come here to correct others. These people don’t seem to remember the reason why they came to Bhagavan in the first place. If they do one *namaskāram* to us they think that the ashram is then their kingdom. Such people think that we ought to behave like their slaves, only doing whatever they think we ought to do.’

### **Arunachala Mudaliar**

There is a street in Tiruvannamalai called Avarangattu Street which had, at the turn of the century, its own Siva *bhajan* group. The head of this group, Arunachala Mudaliar, used to visit Bhagavan in Virupaksha Cave. After a lapse of many years he came to see Bhagavan again sometime in the 1930s. He did *namaskāram* and then studied Bhagavan intently for some time.

Finally he said, ‘Bhagavan, when you were living on the hill you were shining like the sun, but now that state has gone. Now that your brother has come, all these cows have come, all this furniture has come. You have been spoilt.’

Bhagavan readily agreed with him by nodding and saying, ‘Yes, yes’.

Arunachala Mudaliar looked very happy when Bhagavan confirmed that he had lost all his power. He did *namaskāram* again and then left to talk to Chinnaśwami.

After he had left the hall I asked Bhagavan, ‘Why did you agree with this man when he said that you had been spoilt?’

Bhagavan laughed and replied, ‘Because it is true. My “I” has been permanently spoilt.’

I had been quite shocked when Bhagavan had agreed with this man but when I heard his explanation I suddenly felt very happy because it reminded me of a verse by Manikkavachagar [a 9th century Tamil saint]: ‘My “I” was spoilt, my body was spoilt, my *jīva* was spoilt, my mind was spoilt.’

Bhagavan’s ‘I’ was spoilt long before he went to Virupaksha

Cave. He only spoke in this way because this man was incapable of understanding that it is impossible for a *jñāni* to fall into *samsāra* again.

*A similar incident happened while Bhagavan was still living on the hill. Arunachala Mudaliar had been expounding at great length a philosophy which was completely alien to Bhagavan's. Bhagavan nodded his head frequently during this discourse in order to give Arunachala Mudaliar the impression that he was agreeing with him.*

*After Arunachala Mudaliar had left his son asked Bhagavan, 'Why did you pretend that you were agreeing with him? You know that what he said was not correct.'*

*Bhagavan answered him by saying, 'Because the truth cannot be accurately conveyed in words, it is pointless to query one man's opinion of the truth with another collection of words. I know that you disagree with his ideas but you don't have to quarrel with him. He is your elder. Nō harm will come to you if you defer to him and agree with what he says whenever he starts to talk like this.'*

*Around 1908 Bhagavan condensed a voluminous Tamil work called Vichāra Sāgaram [The Ocean of Enquiry] into a few pages. He called this abridgement Vichāra Sāgara Sāra Sangraham. Arunachala Mudaliar asked Bhagavan if he could publish this work under his own name. Bhagavan cared so little about authorship that he permitted him to do so. When the book appeared in 1909 it was the second of Bhagavan's works to appear in print. The first, in 1908, was his translation of Vivēkachūdāmani. Bhagavan admitted that he was the author of Vichāra Sāgara Sāra Sangraham many years later when the first English translation of this work was being prepared by Munagala Venkataramiah (see The Mountain Path 1984, p. 93). After Bhagavan's authorship had been established, the name of the work was changed to Vichāra Mani Mālai.*

### **An imperfect world**

Bhagavan once told me a mythological story about a quarrel between Subramania and Brahma.

Subramania once looked at the world Brahma had created and saw that all the people in it were obsessed by emotions such as jealousy, anger and greed. He looked a little longer and saw that these people were nearly always miserable and that they were often fighting and quarrelling with each other. He told Brahma that his creation was badly flawed.

'You should have created a universe filled with perfection not imperfection,' he said. 'Why have you filled the world with such bad people?'

When Brahma refused to concede that he had made any mistakes, the two gods had a heated dispute which only ended when Subramania overpowered Brahma, imprisoned him, and wiped out the whole of his creation. To demonstrate the correctness of his arguments Subramania then decided to create a new world which would be perfect in every respect. He began his act of creation but soon discovered that it was not possible to put any life or movement into this world. Even the sun and moon that he had created refused to move in the sky. Because the only inhabitants of this world were *jnānis*, absolute stillness prevailed everywhere.

Some time later Siva came along and asked, 'Why have you locked up Brahma?'

Subramania replied, 'That man was doing a lot of mischief. He was always creating people who were quarrelling and causing trouble. Look at my creation! All *nishthās* [people who are established in the Self].'

Siva studied the world for some time before remarking, 'There is no movement in this world; no sun, no moon. You have created a world of *sūnya* [void].'

Subramania reviewed his creation and had to admit that Siva was correct. He released Brahma from prison and permitted him to create another imperfect world.

Bhagavan used to say that there can never be a perfect world because the world is always a creation of the imperfect mind. A perfect object cannot be made by such an imperfect tool.

He also used to say, 'While the mind exists, good and bad exist; but for *jnānis*, who have no mind at all, there is no good or bad and no world'.

One other anecdote about creation is worth recounting. Jnanasambandhar, the 6th century Saivite saint, was touring South India when he arrived at a temple he had not previously visited.

Before he entered it he had a dream in which Lord Siva appeared and told him, 'You will be given a palanquin of pearls'.

On the same day Siva appeared in the dream of one of the temple trustees and said, 'There is a palanquin of pearls in your storeroom. Give it to Jnanasambandhar to use.'

The trustee went to the storeroom, found the palanquin and

gave it to the saint. The palanquin was not part of the temple's property. It had mysteriously manifested there on the day that Siva appeared in the trustee's dream.

Bhagavan told us this story while we were sitting in the hall. At the conclusion of the narrative I asked Bhagavan, 'How did the palanquin appear out of nowhere in the storeroom?'

Bhagavan replied, 'The God who has the power to create the whole universe in a single instant, for such a being, would it be a difficult thing to create one small palanquin?'

### *Samādhi and pārāyana*

Bhagavan sometimes went into a trance-like *samādhi* state while he was listening to the Tamil *pārāyana* [the daily chanting of scriptural works that took place in his presence]. I was told that this had happened quite frequently at Skandashram and in the early 1920s at Sri Ramanasramam, but by the time I arrived at the ashram such occurrences were fairly rare.

When I first saw it happening Dandapani Swami was still the ashram manager. Bhagavan had gone into *samādhi* during the evening *pārāyana* and failed to come out of it even when the dinner bell was rung. In an attempt to wake him up, Dandapani Swami repeatedly blew a conch in Bhagavan's ear while another devotee started shaking Bhagavan's legs. Neither activity had any effect. Bhagavan eventually regained normal consciousness without their assistance about five minutes later.

As I was a little intrigued by these states I once asked Bhagavan, 'What is *samādhi*?'

Bhagavan replied by showing me the 25th verse of chapter forty-three of the *Ribhu Gītā* in which Nidaga explains to his Guru, Ribhu, how he attained *samādhi*.

'I' is forever *Brahman* and *Brahman* is indeed 'I'. This conviction, when firmly experienced, is known as unshaken *samādhi*. That is *samādhi* when there is thought-free *nirvikalpa* [no differences] abidance, freed from all appearances of duality. My Lord, through these two types of *samādhi* I have attained the bliss of *jīvanmukta* [liberation while still alive] and become the spotless Supreme.

*Bhagavan once defined the true nature of nirvikalpa samādhi in*

the following way: 'The mere non-perception of differences [vikalpas] outside is not the real nature of firm nirvikalpa. Know that the non-rising of differences in the dead mind alone is the true nirvikalpa.' Guru Vāchaka Kōvai verse 893, cited in Be As You Are, p. 161.

Bhagavan sometimes went into *samādhi* on other occasions. I was once making garlands in the Mother's Temple when Bhagavan came in and sat nearby. After exchanging a few remarks Bhagavan went into a deep *samādhi* state, with his eyes open, and didn't move for about half an hour. He became so statue-like that even his breathing stopped. There was no blinking or flickering of the eyes, no sign of breathing—I put my hand in front of his face to check—and no movement at all in the body. When he returned to normal he laughed and carried on as if nothing had happened.

Although deep *samādhis* like this were not common, Bhagavan always seemed to be in some kind of minor trance whenever the *pārāyana* was being chanted. He would sit statue-like, with a glazed look in his eyes, and often confessed afterwards that he couldn't remember hearing much of the chanting.

I recollect one amusing incident that took place early one morning, just before the *pārāyana* was to be chanted. For several weeks Bhagavan had not been eating much food in the evening. As a result, he tended to get a little hungry at about 4 a.m. the following morning. To assuage his hunger Bhagavan used to roast peanuts on his *kumutti* and eat them. After he had roasted them he would offer some to Krishnaswami, his attendant, and to anyone else who happened to be in the hall at that time.

On this particular morning Bhagavan took out his peanuts and told Krishnaswami, 'Before they start the *Vēda pārāyana* let us do peanut *pārāyana*.'

*The daily Vēda pārāyana, which was chanted in Sanskrit, was started about 1935. Prior to this time the twice-daily pārāyana consisted only of Tamil verses.*

In addition to the regular *pārāyana* we also chanted a lot from the *Ribhu Gītā*. Bhagavan had such a high opinion of this book that he told several of us to read it regularly as part of our *sādhana*. He even said that constant reading of this book leads to *samādhi*. I

was one of the devotees who was told to read this book regularly. The regular *pārāyana* was done at fixed times in the morning and evening but the *Ribhu Gītā* readings were irregular. Sometimes we would read from it at about three in the afternoon, and sometimes at about eight at night.

When the regular *pārāyana* ended Bhagavan and the assembled devotees would often sit in silence for about half an hour. Once, during the time when I was supervising the building works, I walked into the hall during this period of silence and prostrated to Bhagavan. Bhagavan, who had been sitting with his eyes closed till then, immediately opened them and started talking about building matters.

When our discussion was over one of the devotees remarked to Bhagavan, 'You were sitting in silence with your eyes closed but when Annamalai Swami appeared you immediately opened them and started to talk about construction work'.

Bhagavan replied to the implied query by saying, 'Annamalai Swami's mind was full of building thoughts. You are all sitting here in silence and peace. I was also in silence. Annamalai Swami is carrying all the ashram buildings in his head. When he entered the hall all these building thoughts made me talk.'

### ***Namaskārams* [prostrations]**

Bhagavan occasionally got irritated if devotees prostrated to him excessively or absent-mindedly, without devotion. I can give several examples of this. I was once making garlands for the Mother's *pūjā* when Bhagavan came into the temple and sat in the *padmāsana* [full-lotus posture].

While I was prostrating to him he criticised me by saying, 'If you do like this, all the others will feel obliged to follow suit. Why should you all do *namaskāram* to me like this? I do not think that I am someone greater than you. We are all one.'

The others ignored these hints and went ahead with their own prostrations.

If there were any devotees sitting on the ground when Bhagavan came out of the hall, they would immediately stand up as a mark of respect. This mechanical gesture of deference occasionally annoyed him.

On one such occasion he told the standing devotees, 'Why are you standing like this? Why don't you stay seated on the floor? Am I a tiger or a snake that you should jump up every time I appear?'

On another occasion, when Bhagavan was going for a walk along the foot of the hill, an ashram worker saw him, stopped his work, and prostrated full length on the ground.

Bhagavan told him, 'If you do your duty properly, that itself is a great *namaskāram*. If everyone did his own appointed duty [*swadharma*], without swerving from it, it would be easy to reach the Self.'

Bhagavan once expounded the theory behind *namaskāram* and explained why he disliked people continually prostrating to him.

'Initially, the practice of *namaskāram* was introduced by great people as an aid to dedicating their mind and body to God. This original purpose has now been entirely lost. Nowadays people think, "If we do one *namaskāram* to Swami we can charm him into doing whatever we want". This is a big error because Swami can never be deceived. Only those selfish people who perform *namaskāram* with false motives will be cheated. I don't like seeing people come and do *namaskāram* to me. What *namaskāram* is needed? To keep one's mind on the correct spiritual path is alone the greatest *namaskāram*.'

Bhagavan didn't seem to mind if we did *namaskāram* with love; he only raised objections on a few occasions when he thought that we were prostrating to him out of habit rather than devotion.

I remember one incident which illustrates this very well. One day, after lunch, I was walking with Bhagavan in Palakottu. Bhagavan went behind a bush to defecate because at that time there were no proper toilets in the ashram. While I was waiting for him to reappear I noticed that a large military convoy was driving towards Bangalore. One soldier, who must have been a devotee, stopped his vehicle, got out and ran into the ashram. He was obviously in a great hurry because he should have been keeping up with the convoy. I was told later by the devotees who were in the ashram that he ran into the ashram and immediately asked for Bhagavan. When he was told that Bhagavan had gone to Palakottu he carried on running and reached me a few minutes later.

As he was calling out, 'Where is Bhagavan? Where is Bhagavan?' Bhagavan stood up and came out from behind his bush.

It was the middle of the day in the hottest part of the year. The sand and stones were almost too hot to touch, but even so, the soldier prostrated himself full-length on the ground in front of Bhagavan.

A few seconds later he called out to Bhagavan: 'My *karma* is very difficult. I cannot stop here for more than a few seconds. Please bless me.'

Bhagavan looked at him affectionately and 'blessed' him with a grace-filled smile. After a few seconds the soldier got up and ran back to his waiting vehicle.

As we were walking back to the ashram, Bhagavan praised the action of the soldier: 'In spite of having a very complex *karma*, he had a very strong impulse to come and see me. His actions alone show that he has already reached a high level of devotion.'

When Bhagavan went for a walk in Palakottu or on the hill there was a rule that only his attendant could accompany him. This attendant had orders to discourage all other people from coming near Bhagavan, or from asking him questions. Occasionally some devotees who had problems which they didn't want to discuss openly in the hall would catch him and discuss the problem while he was walking, but this privilege was only given to intimate devotees. Other people were kept away. If I had followed the rules strictly I would have kept the soldier away from Bhagavan, but since he was obviously in a great hurry I made no attempt to prevent him from having his brief *darshan*.

I can remember one other occasion when Bhagavan appeared to approve of a devotee falling at his feet. Bhagavan was sitting on a sofa outside the hall and many devotees were coming, prostrating, and then leaving. A Christian priest came into the ashram but he didn't come near Bhagavan, nor did he attempt to prostrate. He just stood at a distance and watched Bhagavan with evident curiosity for about forty-five minutes. Finally, just like a tree falling down, he went down on the floor, prostrated full-length and then left. He had obviously had some experience which convinced him of Bhagavan's greatness but we never found out what it was because he left without saying a word.

After he had gone, Bhagavan smiled and remarked, 'He couldn't control himself any longer without doing *namaskāram*'.

A devotee once approached Bhagavan and asked him if he could prostrate to him and touch his feet.

Bhagavan replied: 'The real feet of Bhagavan exist only in the heart of the devotee. To hold onto these feet incessantly is true happiness. You will be disappointed if you hold onto my physical feet because one day this physical body will disappear. The greatest worship is worshipping the Guru's feet that are within oneself.'

## Managers and Would-be Managers

When I first came to Bhagavan the ashram was being managed by Dandapani Swami, the father-in-law of Muruganar. He was a big strong man who enjoyed spending money and eating good food. In the years that he was manager he spent the ashram's money very freely, so freely in fact that we were often in debt. In those days the ashram was very poor. There was rarely any money and devotees' donations were often used to pay off our debts. Fortunately, our needs were very few; we rarely had to purchase anything except food. If the food donated by devotees was not sufficient to feed us all, we used to supplement it by buying food from a devotee who owned a shop in town. This shop (called the Poluran shop because the owner came from Polur) was located near the temple, just off Tiruvoodal Street. The owner gave us unlimited credit facilities because he knew that sooner or later some rich visiting devotee would come along and pay off all our debts.

This hand-to-mouth existence was exacerbated by Dandapani Swami's profligate ways. If a devotee came along and donated some money, Dandapani Swami would spend it all on expensive items such as vadai, payasam and badam halva [a sweet made from almonds]. We would feast for two days, living like kings. Then, on the third day, one of us would have to go to the Poluran shop to buy the next day's food on credit. Dandapani Swami also spent freely when there was little or no money. On one occasion he hired one of his relatives as a cook at Rs. 15 a month. The ashram had no money to pay him and the food which he cooked had to be bought on credit. Bhagavan disapproved of this unnecessary expenditure.

I remember him once saying to Dandapani Swami, 'Why are you spending money like this? You could have prepared some gruel, or some other cheap food, limited our expenses and made these donations last a long time. You are wasting money on unnecessary expensive items and then complaining the next day that there is no money.'

Dandapani Swami attempted to balance the books by collecting money in Bhagavan's or the ashram's name. Bhagavan was

utterly opposed to this. He did not mind if devotees voluntarily contributed money but he frequently got angry if he heard that ashram officials were asking for money on his behalf. Bhagavan had spoken to Dandapani Swami about this on several occasions but the matter finally came to a head when we received a visit from the Raja of Ramanathapuram.

When the Raja arrived Bhagavan was in the kitchen, cleaning some green leaves. Bhagavan was told that the Raja had come but he paid no attention. He just carried on cleaning the leaves, very slowly and very thoroughly. Finally, when the work was done, he came to the hall and sat on his sofa. The Raja did *namaskāram* to him, stayed for about an hour, asked a few questions, and then left.

As the Raja was leaving the ashram, Dandapani Swami accompanied him as far as the Dakshinamurti shrine.

While he was walking alongside him, Dandapani Swami remarked to the Raja, 'As you can see, Bhagavan has no proper buildings. We have very little money for such things. Sometimes, we don't even have enough to buy food.'

Without actually asking for money, he made it quite clear that a donation would be very welcome.

Some other devotees overheard these remarks and reported them to Bhagavan. When Dandapani Swami returned from seeing the Raja off, Bhagavan reprimanded him very severely.

'You have spoilt that Raja,' he said. 'He has a palace, a lot of money, and all the pleasures that money can bring, but he became frustrated because he began to realise that money could not buy him happiness. He came to me, a man with a loincloth and nothing else, and asked, "I am an unhappy man. Is there any way that I can attain happiness?" He came here to find happiness but you have shattered his hopes with your begging and your complaints. Now this man will be thinking, "This man is not happy in his state of poverty. He is still asking for things." He will go back to his place thinking, "Poverty is not the answer. Happiness can only come from money and all the things that it can buy." You have ruined this man by speaking like this. Whoever comes here in future, you are never again to say to them that Swami needs money. Don't ever ask for money again.'

Dandapani Swami also caused problems because he had an aggressive and argumentative temperament. A few years before I

came to Sri Ramanasramam he physically assaulted Chinna-swami during a *bhikshā* which was held in Bhagavan's honour in Palakottu. The trouble started when Chinna-swami started to scold some of the devotees for misbehaving. Bhagavan noticed this and criticised him for doing it.

Seeing this, Dandapani Swami shouted angrily at Chinna-swami, 'Why did you go against the wishes of Bhagavan like this?'

Chinna-swami made some reply and a big quarrel broke out between them. Dandapani Swami got so angry that he grabbed Chinna-swami by the throat and started pushing him towards the Palakottu tank. Bhagavan had been watching all this in silence, but when it looked as if Dandapani Swami might throw Chinna-swami into the water, he intervened by hitting Dandapani Swami on the back with his stick. The fight immediately stopped.

Bhagavan then addressed both of them and said, 'I am not interested in who wins your fight. That is not my concern. But both of you are wearing the orange robes of *sannyāsins*. If one of you kills the other, *sannyāsins* everywhere will get a bad name. So stop it.'



*I have located three published accounts of this incident: one by Sadhu Natanananda (Ramana Darshanam, chapter 45), one by M.V. Krishnan (The Mountain Path, 1979, p. 225), and one by Ra. Ganapati (Kalki Dipāvali Malar, 1986, pp. 109–10). None of the accounts agrees in all respects with any of the others. However, they all agree that there was a physical struggle between Chinna-swami and Dandapani Swami and that Bhagavan stopped it by hitting the latter. Annamalai Swami did not directly witness this incident, he only heard the story second hand. The version he heard corresponds very closely to the one published by Sadhu Natanananda.*

During the years that Dandapani Swami was manager both Bhagavan and Chinna-swami tried to get him to change his ways, but neither of them had much success. When persuasion failed, Chinna-swami started to campaign against him by telling both resident and visiting devotees that he was mismanaging the ashram and wasting its funds. Eventually he mobilised enough support to force Dandapani Swami out.

Ashram managers were not appointed by Bhagavan, they were nominated by the devotees. When a manager lost the goodwill of the majority of the devotees his position became untenable. This is

what happened in the case of Dandapani Swami. The result of Chinnaswami's campaign was that a deputation of dissatisfied devotees came from town and told him that they no longer wanted him to be manager. After telling him that they would not tolerate his financial excesses any more, they ordered him to leave the same day. He was told that if he ever wished to return, he would not be allowed to stay for more than three days at a time. Dandapani Swami appealed to Bhagavan to save his position but Bhagavan refused to intervene.

He told Dandapani Swami: 'Before, you were dominating everyone by using your powers. Now they are dominating you. What can I say? My work is merely to look at all these happenings.'

Realising that Bhagavan would not save him, Dandapani Swami gave in to the demands of the devotees and left the ashram.

After executing this coup the devotees from both the ashram and the town got together and decided that Chinnaswami should be the new manager. Bhagavan took no part in these discussions. He merely endorsed the devotees' choice when it was presented to him. Chinnaswami was delighted with the decision because he had wanted the job for many years.

Not everyone was satisfied with this choice. Ganapati Muni, for example, had wanted the job for himself but he could not muster enough support for his claim. This lack of support did not deter him. A few months after Chinnaswami took over he decided to bypass the devotees and ask Bhagavan himself if he could take over the management of the ashram.

As he was walking towards the ashram, accompanied by some of his followers, Seshadri Swami spotted him, read his mind, and burst out laughing.

'Ho! Ho!' he cried, 'You are going to manage Ramanashram are you?'

*Seshadri Swami was the eccentric saint whose encounter with Annamalai Swami was reported in Chapter One. In the 1920s people who had a desire which they wanted Bhagavan to fulfil would often go to see Seshadri Swami first in order to get some indication of whether their desire was likely to be fulfilled. Seshadri Swami would read their minds and react in a negative way if he felt that Bhagavan would not grant the wish.*

This negative remark, uttered so derisively by Seshadri Swami, would have deterred most people, but Ganapati Muni carried on with his mission. He went to the old hall and began to tell Bhagavan that Chinnaswami was not managing the ashram properly.

As he was telling Bhagavan that he would like to manage the ashram himself, Bhagavan interrupted him by saying, 'Did you come here for this purpose? Chinnaswami is already doing the job. He has been doing *tapas* for many years to get this job. Why are you interfering?'

Realising that Bhagavan would not support him in his claim, Ganapati Muni went back to town and never raised the matter again.

Bhagavan had not interfered when Dandapani Swami and Chinnaswami had quarrelled about management matters, but he was clearly against Ganapati Muni having a say in the running of the ashram. Soon after this incident I overheard Bhagavan talking to Chinnaswami about Ganapati Muni and his followers.

'Picha,' he said, 'be careful with these people. If you let them have any authority here, they will soon take over so completely that you will have to ask their permission to wag your tail!'

*'Picha' is a family nickname which Chinnaswami acquired during his childhood. Bhagavan's seemingly strange reply is actually a translation of a Tamil proverb.*

While these management quarrels were taking place there was a lot of friction between Chinnaswami and Ganapati Muni. They both had very strong personalities and they frequently clashed about various aspects of ashram policy. They even quarrelled about pointless, trivial matters. I remember very well one rather childish dispute that they conducted in public. Ganapati Muni had been saying that he was Bhagavan's leading disciple. This statement annoyed Chinnaswami because he always liked to think that he was Bhagavan's foremost devotee. Chinnaswami refused to accept the claim and told Ganapati Muni that he was a better devotee. When Ganapati Muni refused to admit it, a quarrel broke out between them. They eventually took their dispute to Bhagavan and asked him to adjudicate on it. Initially, Bhagavan refused to give any opinion but when it became clear, after a few days of public wrangling in the hall, that the dispute was not going to die

down, he decided to intervene. I was Bhagavan's attendant at that time so I was in a good position to watch the dispute evolve and to witness Bhagavan's response to it. Bhagavan first said a few nice things about Chinnaśwami and then afterwards paid some compliments to Gaṇapati Muni, but he refused to resolve the argument in favour of either of them. Then he gave both of them a gentle reminder about the necessity of humility on the spiritual path.

'Whatever effort is made by whichever person, that which is the reality will always remain. No one, however great, can give another person either *mōksha* or *bandha* [liberation or bondage].

'It is natural for a person to think that he should be well-known to the people of the world and be praised by them. But if this thought is present one cannot attain true greatness or happiness. God is not interested in those who promote their own claims to greatness. One who is not satisfactory to God is an inferior person, not a great one. If anyone dedicates both his mind and his body to God in every possible way, God will make him be famous and praised by people all over the world.'

Bhagavan then supported his remarks by quoting a verse from *Vairāgya Sataḥam*:

O mind, you are thinking how to make the people of the world regard you as great. The ever-existing God alone is the one who bestows bondage and liberation. What is the use of others knowing your greatness? O mind, perform the rare *tapas* of surrendering to the holy golden feet of God. Then God will make you so great that the world will know your greatness and praise you. Know thus.

Later that day, when I was walking alone on the hill with Bhagavan, I talked to him about this incident.

'When you were alternately praising Gaṇapati Muni and Chinnaśwami, I couldn't tell from your comments which side you were really favouring.'

Bhagavan laughed and said, 'Chinnaśwami is thinking, "I am a great man," and Gaṇapati Muni is thinking, "I am a great man". The truth is that neither of them is great.'

On returning to the hall Bhagavan gave me a Tamil work called *Sivabhōga Sāram* and showed verse ninety-six to me:

Those who suppress the thought 'I am great' by not paying any attention to it, the *Vēdas* will say that they are great.

Those who say 'I am great' are small people. Say, other than them, who will undergo misery in this world?

*Annamalai Swami wrote an account of this dispute in his diary in 1938. The incident itself happened in 1928. When Munagala Venkataramiah borrowed this diary in order to find new material for the manuscript which was eventually published as Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, he severely abridged and censored this story. What remained after his censorship was printed as Talk no. 544. In this brief account Ganapati Muni and ChinnaSwami are referred to as 'two bhaktas'.*

There was one devotee in the ashram at that time who, for me at least, exemplified Bhagavan's teachings on humility and selfless devotion. His name was Viran and he was employed by the ashram to carry water.

In the early days of the ashram there was always a water shortage. As the ashram well did not produce enough water to meet all our needs, we had to bring in supplies from outside. At about 4 p.m. every day everyone in the ashram, except for Bhagavan, had to go to the Palakottu tank with a bucket to collect water. We each had to bring about ten buckets of water a day to the ashram. This was quite a strenuous activity because the main ashram buildings were about 150 yards from the tank. In summer, when the water level in the Palakottu tank was very low, our drinking water was brought in a cart from the Boomanda tank, which is located near the mosque in town. All this water had to be stored in big vessels in the ashram.

Since all these activities still failed to produce enough water to meet all our needs, we engaged a man called Viran to carry water full-time from the Palakottu tank to the ashram. In addition to carrying water, he also used to work on various other little jobs that needed to be done in and around the ashram. Although he had been engaged primarily to do ashram work, he was also willing to help any of the resident devotees with their daily chores. If anyone called him to do some work, he would immediately come. No work was too menial for him. He was even willing to work in the middle of the night if anyone asked him to. He was a very humble man whose main aim in life seemed to be to please other people. If anyone addressed him disrespectfully, because he came from a low caste, Bhagavan would immediately show his disapproval.

‘Why do you call him like this?’ he would ask. ‘If you want him to do any work you should call him with love and affection.’

Bhagavan often showed a lot of love towards this man because he knew he was very humble and because he knew he performed all his chores with love and devotion.

Bhagavan was not the only one who was impressed with his work. A rich devotee, after watching Viran work, decided to help him by paying for his son’s education. The devotee put the boy in a good school in Madras and paid for all his expenses. The ashramites also used to help him by giving him left-over food from the kitchen to take home to his family.

Viran’s humility was a shining example of Bhagavan’s teachings in action.

On many occasions Bhagavan told me, ‘Become envious of anyone lower than you. You must become very small. In fact you must become nothing. Only a person who is nobody can abide in the Self.’

Bhagavan often spoke to us about the necessity of humility. On another occasion he told me, ‘No one should be our inferior. One who has learned to be the inferior will become superior to all.’

In addition to Chinnaśwami, Ganapati Muni and Dandapani Śwami, there was a man called Perumā Śwami who wanted to be the manager of the ashram.

*The saga of Perumā Śwami is one of the most astonishing and least-known chapters in the history of Sri Ramanasramam. It is a long and occasionally sordid story of one man’s lust for power and revenge. It is also a salutary example of how the power which a jñāni emanates occasionally stimulates egos rather than quiets them down. While I was making enquiries about this story I casually mentioned to Annamalai Śwami that no proper account of Perumā Śwami’s activities had so far appeared in print.*

*Annamalai Śwami laughingly remarked, ‘Trying to tell the story of Bhagavan without mentioning Perumā Śwami is like trying to retell the story of the Rāmāyana without mentioning Ravana [the principle villain of the epic]’.*

*After collecting all the information for this story I came to the same conclusion and decided to publish a lengthy account.*

*This is probably the most appropriate place to include one of my own personal stories. After I had completed an early draft of this*

book I had a dream in which I found myself sitting in the old hall in front of Bhagavan with a file containing the manuscript of this book on my knee.

'What's that?' said Bhagavan, pointing at the file.

'I've written a book about Annamalai Swami,' I replied. 'Some parts of it may prove to be controversial, so I was wondering what to do about them.'

'Show it to me,' said Bhagavan.

I handed over the file. Bhagavan put on his reading glasses and began to leaf through the manuscript, spending a few seconds on a scrutiny of each page. He began the inspection with a serious and intent look on his face, but after turning a few pages I could see that he was beginning to smile.

Finally, he broke out into a laugh, looked at me and said, 'This is very good. Publish it as it is.'

Perumal Swami had first come to the ashram in 1914, while Bhagavan was still living in Virupaksha Cave. Initially he had served as Bhagavan's attendant but after a few years he also took over the job of ashram manager. When Bhagavan came down the hill to live at Sri Ramanasramam, Perumal Swami left and went to live in the Mula Mandapam in the Arunachaleswara Temple. He still came to see Bhagavan occasionally but after 1922 he took no part in the management of the ashram. After his departure three other managers—Gopal Rao, Vasudeva Sastri and Dandapani Swami—came and went before Chinnaśwami finally took over as manager and *sarvādhikārī*.

*In the years before Chinnaśwami took complete control of the ashram's management some departments of the ashram functioned in a virtually autonomous way. When Chinnaśwami brought all the activities under his own control, he gave himself the title 'Sarvādhikārī', meaning 'ruler of all'. He assumed the title in order to send a message to everyone that he alone was responsible for the running of all the ashram's different activities.*

For a few years after 1922 the ashram had no resident manager. Its affairs were handled by a group of *sādhus* who lived in the Mula Mandapam in town. They collected funds and food for the ashram and passed them onto the devotees who were staying at Sri Ramanasramam. They also published Bhagavan's works and sold

them in the Ramaniya Vani bookstore which was also located in the Mula Mandapam. Gopal Rao was the most energetic of this group. He almost single-handedly raised the funds that were used to construct the old hall. This group which included Perumal Swami, Iswara Swami and several others called itself the 'Brahmachari Ashram'.

When I first came to the ashram in 1928 this group was still managing the ashram's finances. I discovered this when a visiting devotee gave me a Rs. 200 donation for the ashram.

I tried to pass it on Chinnaswami but he declined to accept it, saying, 'I have no authority to accept donations. You must take it to Vasudeva Sastri in town.'

*Most of the residents of Sri Ramanasramam felt that some members of the Brahmachari Ashram were not forwarding all the donations they received to the ashram. Instead, they were using them to support themselves. Chinnaswami put a stop to this when he took over the management by instructing all devotees to bypass this group and give their donations directly to Sri Ramanasramam. He also took all the books from the Ramaniya Vani bookstore and opened his own bookshop in the ashram. By doing this he deprived the Brahmachari Ashram of one of its principal sources of income. Chinnaswami had many detractors but he should be given credit for initiating a strong centralised management which ensured that donations were all utilised for ashram projects.*

*The manuscript, compiled by Paul Brunton, which was later published as Conscious Immortality by Sri Ramanasramam, contains several references to Perumal Swami and the management problems of this period. Unfortunately, they were all edited out prior to publication. I shall refer to this manuscript as 'The Brunton Manuscript' in subsequent comments. On page 114 of this document Brunton records how Bhagavan himself was dissatisfied with those who were looking after the management of the ashram prior to Dandapani Swami.*

*'Maharshi told Dandapani Swami, who complained about the materialistic behaviour of the manager of the ashram [one of his predecessors, not Chinnaswami], that it often happened that an ashram began to lose sight of its original purpose, which was to gather people who wanted to retire from the world for spiritual development. It frequently happened that an ashram became more*

*concerned with the details of material organisation and less concerned with its spiritual purpose, thus becoming deflected from its spiritual path. But in any case, Maharshi said that the material services and work and manual and office labour of an ashram were really intended for a lower order of minds, whilst those who were more advanced could do their meditations away from an ashram in their own solitude.*

*'Maharshi even confessed that he was silent to most of the ashram people because in their heart of hearts they were not so much interested in spiritual Self-realisation as in work and in busying themselves in the material organisation of the ashram, so he thought to himself it would be of no use to talk of the higher things to them.'*

When I first came to the ashram in 1928 Perumal Swami was still claiming that he was the real manager of the ashram. He felt that the three devotees who had held the job after him had all improperly usurped his position. There was a lot of anger and bitterness in him because he had the strange notion that he alone was entitled to manage the ashram. He was still polite and respectful when he came to see Bhagavan but it was easy to see that he was hiding his true feelings. All this anger only came out into the open when Chinnaswami was appointed manager.

Perumal Swami had not always been like this. In the early days at Skandashram he had shown a lot of devotion towards Bhagavan. Once, when Bhagavan had been weakened by an attack of dysentery, Perumal Swami stayed with him night and day. On one occasion during this period, when Bhagavan had severe diarrhoea, Perumal Swami caught the excrement in his hands and then disposed of it outside because he knew that it would be a great strain for Bhagavan to get up and go outside. His devotion also showed in other ways. When he became manager at Skandashram he collected a lot of money so that he could celebrate Bhagavan's *jayanti* on a large scale. Each year, on *jayanti* day, he paid for a big procession to go through the streets of Tiruvannamalai, with Bhagavan's picture at its head. He also collected enough funds to have a statue of Bhagavan made of five different metals. This statue was about three feet high. For many years after he ceased to be manager at Skandashram he continued to celebrate Bhagavan's birthday with this annual procession through town.

The arrival of Chinnaswami at Skandashram seemed to mark a

turning point in his life. As a newcomer, Chinnaswami had to ask Perumal Swami if he could stay in the ashram.

When Perumal Swami referred the matter to Bhagavan, Bhagavan jokingly replied, 'This man will become your enemy. If you want to be safe you should send him away.'

Perumal Swami rejected the advice and allowed him to stay.

Bhagavan's comment was soon proved to be correct. When Chinnaswami had established himself in the ashram he started to take an interest in its management, and this often led him to do things that Perumal Swami did not approve of. Perumal Swami's management problems were compounded by the activities of Dandapani Swami, who was also trying to influence the way the ashram was run. In this conflict of personalities Perumal Swami came to the conclusion, quite wrongly, that Bhagavan was favouring Chinnaswami because he was his brother. Sensing that his authority and position were being undermined, Perumal Swami reacted by becoming increasingly dictatorial. He started to insist that he was the sole manager and that everything should be done his way. This attitude only led to further conflicts.

*In a conversation I had with Ramaswami Pillai (one of the residents of Skandashram during Bhagavan's stay there) he remarked that caste was a major factor in the politics there. Perumal Swami, along with a few other non-brahmin devotees, felt that the brahmins were trying to take control. Perumal Swami resisted their attempts to take on additional responsibilities, feeling that they were all attempts to undermine his authority.*

I once asked Bhagavan why Perumal Swami became an enemy of the ashram after initially being such a good devotee.

Bhagavan replied: 'He was not serving with humility, he always served with a sense of ego. He always had the feeling, "I must be the sole manager of this ashram".'

Bhagavan then went on to tell me the story of Jaya and Vijaya. Vishnu had appointed them watchmen in Vaikunta [one of the heavenly worlds]. They were both very devoted to Vishnu but they were also very proud of their positions. This made them very egotistic. They had a lot of power because everyone who wanted to enter Vaikunta had to get their permission first. One day four *rishis* [sages or seers]—Sanandana, Sanatkumara, Sanaka and Sanatsujata—came to Vaikunta to see Lord Vishnu. Jaya and





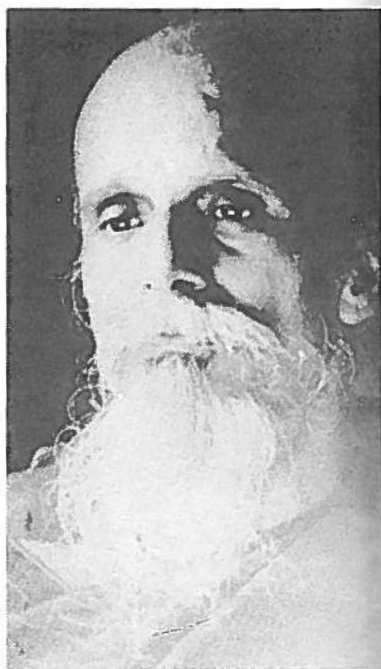
Sitting, Major Chadwick;  
standing, right, Maurice Frydman;  
standing second left, S.S. Cohen.



Lakshman Sharma



Paul Brunton



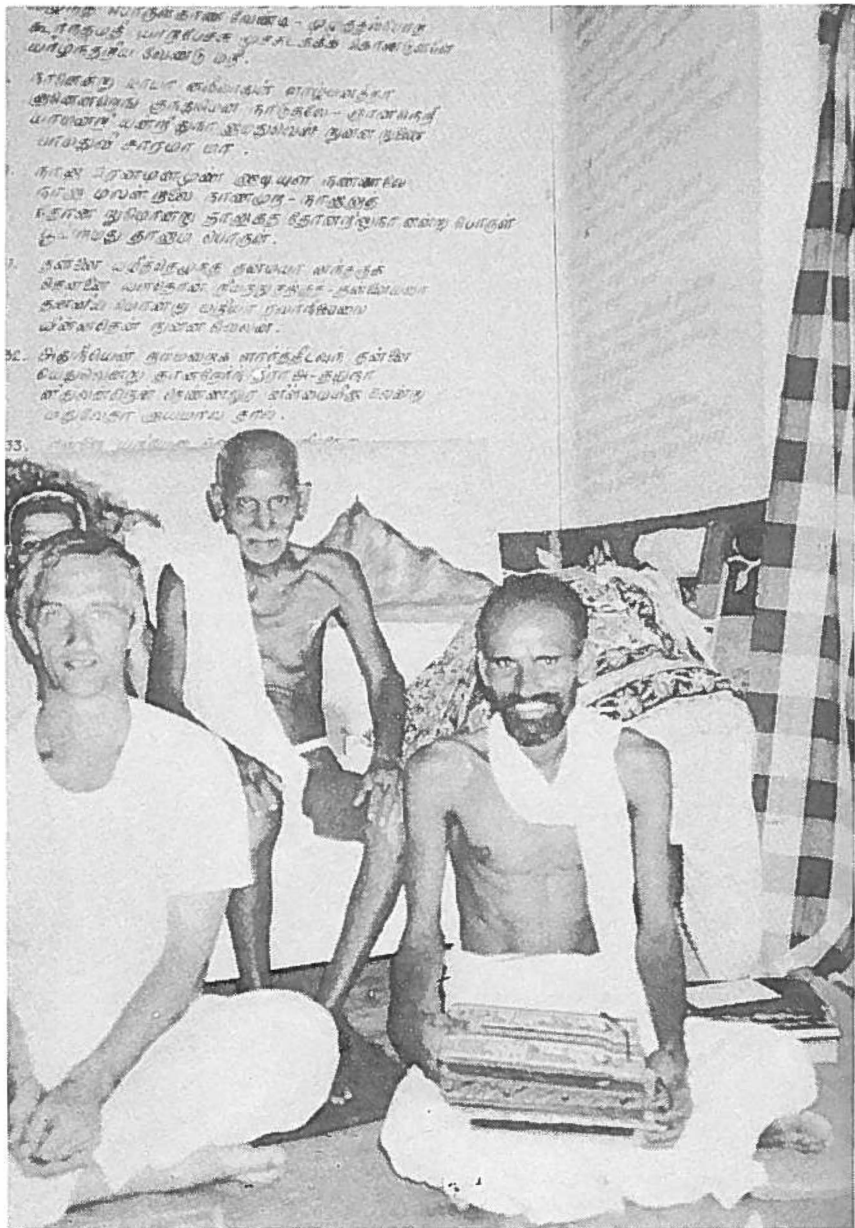
Ganapati Muni



Standing, right to left: 1st Madhava Swami 2nd Vasudeva Sastri  
 8th Gopal Rao 9th Kunju Swami 10th T.K. Sundaresa Iyer.  
 Sitting, right to left: 2nd Chinna Swami 4th Bhagavan  
 5th Ganapati Sastri.



Seshadri Swami



Background: Tamil verses of *Ulladu Nārpadu* painted on Annamalai Swami's wall; resting against it, mostly obscured, a painting of himself in front of Arunachala.  
 Foreground: David Godman, Annamalai Swami and Sundaram, his attendant and translator. Taken November 1993.

Vijaya got very angry with them, for no apparent reason, and refused to let them in. Angered by this refusal, the *rishis* decided to curse Jaya and Vijaya. They said that these two watchmen would have to take birth as the enemies of Lord Vishnu in three successive births before they would be allowed to come back to Vaikunta. When the curse took effect Jaya and Vijaya were reborn as *rākshasas* [demons] during the incarnations of Narasimha, Rama and Krishna.

Bhagavan concluded this story by saying, 'Because they served with a strong sense of ego they had to take birth as Vishnu's enemies. Perumal Swami also served at Skandashram with a strong sense of ego. When his ego got the better of him he became an enemy of the ashram.'

Perumal Swami's egotism and animosity towards Bhagavan were clearly visible in his last years at Skandashram. Bhagavan told me about an incident which illustrates this very well. I was helping Bhagavan to have his bath at the time. Noticing that one of his big toes was slightly crooked, I asked him how it had got like that.

'It got that way while I was at Skandashram,' said Bhagavan. 'Mother was sick at the time and I was looking after her. I thought that it would be good to raise her head a little so I asked Perumal Swami to bring me a short wooden plank to use as a pillow. Perumal Swami had been sulking because of some argument that he had had. Instead of giving me the plank, he threw it at me. It hit this toe and knocked it out of alignment. It has been crooked ever since. I said nothing to Perumal Swami at the time. I just put the board under Mother's head and carried on nursing her.'

In his last months at Skandashram Perumal Swami abandoned his role of attendant and actually started giving orders to Bhagavan.

In one incident that I was told about Perumal Swami told Bhagavan, 'This is my ashram, you must do what I say'.

Bhagavan replied, 'If this is your ashram, you may keep it. I will go and live somewhere else.'

It was not long after this that Bhagavan left Skandashram and went to live at Ramanasramam. Bhagavan never said that these quarrels were the reason for his departure, but they may have been a contributory factor in his decision to leave.

*In The Brunton Manuscript, page 124, it is reported that*

*Perumal Swami once told Bhagavan, 'This [Skandashram] is my building, my property. I put it up.'*

*Bhagavan told him, 'You are full of "I". We are completely opposite so I shall leave you.'*

*Then, according to Brunton, 'Maharshi abruptly abandoned Skandashram to Perumal Swami ... went to the foot of the hill and stayed in [a] hut near his mother's tomb until the present hall was constructed'.*

*In later years if devotees asked Bhagavan why he left Skandashram, he would either say that there was no particular reason or he would say that it was the 'divine will' that prompted him to move (see Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-knowledge, page 80).*

*Several books about Bhagavan report that he moved to his mother's samādhi at the foot of the hill to make it easier for devotees to have access to him. While it is true that many of his elderly devotees found it a great strain to climb several hundred feet up the mountain to see him at Skandashram, I have not come across any published statements by Bhagavan which support this theory.*

When Bhagavan came to live at Sri Ramanasramam Perumal Swami initially treated him very well. He would do *namaskāram*, sit quietly for a while and then go back to town. I once saw him bring a small cup of coffee for Bhagavan in a brass vessel. Bhagavan took a sip before returning the remainder as *prasād*. However, when Chinnaśwami was appointed manager Perumal Swami's old anger was rekindled, expressing itself in a vicious campaign against both Bhagavan and the ashram management.

He began by collecting the ashram's mail from the main Post Office in town. By convincing the postmaster that he was still the manager of the ashram, he was able to intercept the ashram's mail and steal a lot of its donations. To cover up his thefts he had a rubber stamp made in the name of Sri Ramanasramam. After stealing the money he would send devotees acknowledgements for their donations, stamping each letter with this seal to make it look official.

When news of this reached the ashram Bhagavan executed a document which permitted only Chinnaśwami to collect letters which were addressed to either Ramana Maharshi or Sri Ramanasramam. As an additional precaution Chinnaśwami also wrote to all Bhagavan's devotees saying that donations to the ashram should henceforth be sent in his (that is Chinnaśwami's) name.

Prior to these events Chinnaswami had been stamping all correspondence with a seal marked 'Azhagammal Puram'.

*Azhagammal was the name of Bhagavan's mother and Puram means 'place'. Until this incident Chinnaswami had wanted to name the ashram after his mother rather than Bhagavan.*

When Perumal Swami started to stamp his correspondence with the name 'Sri Ramanasramam', Chinnaswami gave up his Azhagammal Puram stamp and also began to use a stamp marked 'Sri Ramanasramam'. He did this because he wanted there to be no doubt about where the real Sri Ramanasramam was.

When Bhagavan was asked about this many years later, he replied, 'Wherever I am, that place is Sri Ramanasramam'.

After the Post Office affair had been settled Perumal Swami engaged an Iyengar brahmin from town to come to the ashram and insult Bhagavan. Before bringing him, Perumal Swami filled him with arrak and toddy [home-made alcoholic drinks] so that he would give a better performance. They came to the ashram together and stood in the southern doorway of the old hall. The Iyengar shouted abuse at Bhagavan while Perumal Swami stood next to him, silently smiling. I was not in the hall when they arrived, I was in the temple making garlands with Rangaswami. When Ramakrishna Swami came and told us that a drunk was insulting Bhagavan I got very angry.

I remembered a saying of Ramakrishna Paramahansa: 'If anyone insults your Guru, you should throw him out of the ashram or leave yourself in disgrace.'

I decided to act on the advice. After convincing Rangaswami that it was our duty to save Bhagavan from such troubles, we both raced to the hall.

Although Perumal Swami was only a silent witness to the scene, it was clear from the smiling expression on his face that he was the mastermind behind it. Still full of anger I went up to him and waved my fist under his nose.

'If I hit you on this side of the face,' I told him, pointing to the left side of his face, 'I will hit you so hard that this side of your face [pointing to the right side] will also swell up!'

I had a big strong body in those days so I could easily have carried out my threat. When Perumal Swami saw that I was serious

he told the Iyengar brahmin to stop. Without saying another word they both left the ashram.

Chinnaswami and some of the other brahmins congratulated us on our bravery. They all said they were very happy to know that there were still two fearless people in the ashram who were willing to defend Bhagavan against attacks like this. In previous years they had depended on Dandapani Swami's strength to protect them. Bhagavan's attitude was harder to gauge. While the attack was in progress he had sat cross-legged on the sofa with his eyes closed. His body had been trembling slightly and he had looked to me like a man who had been trying to control his anger. He never spoke to me about this incident but he seemed to approve of my role in it. In the days that followed he was unusually gracious to me. I took this to be a silent approval of my intervention.

*From The Brunton Manuscript, page 114: 'Once when Mahārshi was abused in his own presence violently by an emissary of Perumal Swami, he listened silently to the whole harangue.*

*'At the end he said, "One day I will get up and go away altogether".'*

*Annamalai Swami does not recollect Bhagavan making this statement at that time.*

It was about this time that Perumal Swami tried to dispose of his famous statue. He had been keeping it at Pavalakundru, one of the temples that Bhagavan had lived in before he moved to the hill. Perumal Swami showed the statue to a blacksmith and asked him to make a small carriage for it. When the blacksmith asked him what the carriage would be used for, Perumal Swami told him that he intended to have the statue pulled through the streets of Tiruvannamalai while he continuously spat at it. When he had attracted a big enough crowd by these actions he intended to publicly smash the statue. The blacksmith, who was a devotee of Bhagavan, refused to have anything to do with the plan. I have no idea what eventually happened to the statue. All I know is that no one in Tiruvannamalai was willing to make the carriage for him.

Soon after the Iyengar incident we heard that Perumal Swami was planning to build a hut near the iluppai tree that stands just inside the front gate of the ashram. He probably thought that he could carry on his campaign more effectively if he were living in the ashram itself. Because he knew that Chinnaswami would never

give him permission to build there, he decided to build his hut secretly in the middle of the night. A devotee in town got to hear of this plan and warned us in advance.

There was a sub-inspector of police in Tiruvannamalai who was a devotee of Bhagavan. T.K. Sundaresa Iyer went to see him to ask what we should do about this latest threat. The sub-inspector said that if we could erect a temporary fence to enclose the ashram, with a small gateway at the front, he would post two policemen at the entrance to prevent Perumal Swami from entering the land at night. The ashram had very little money to spare but we followed the sub-inspector's advice and enclosed all the ashram land with a fence made out of bamboo poles and rope. Prior to this time the ashram's land had never been enclosed. Perumal Swami was apparently not informed either about the fence or the police guards. He turned up a few nights later with a bullock cart full of bamboo poles and coconut leaves, obviously intending to build a hut. The policemen on duty at the gate turned him away, saying that they had instructions to prevent him from entering the premises.

When his attempt to move into the ashram failed, Perumal Swami started a court case against Bhagavan and Chinnaśwami. I don't know all the details because Chinnaśwami never discussed ashram business with devotees, but I do know that Perumal Swami was claiming that he was the real manager of the ashram.

*In his submission to the court Perumal Swami supported his case with some rather convoluted logic. Firstly, he declared that since Bhagavan was a sannyāsin he could not legally own land or property. This being so, Perumal Swami argued, Bhagavan had no rights over the property known as Sri Ramanasramam. Perumal Swami then went on to argue that since Bhagavan could not own any of the ashram's property, he had no authority to appoint Chinnaśwami to manage it. Having disposed of Chinnaśwami's claim in this way, he advanced his own case by saying that since he had been the undisputed manager at Skandashram, he must still be the ashram manager because neither Bhagavan nor anyone else was legally competent to remove or replace him.*

*Perumal Swami's complaint to the court conveniently ignored two important points:*

- 1) Bhagavan had never claimed that he was a sannyāsin.*

*Since he had never formally been initiated into any order of sannyāsa, he was still entitled to own and dispose of property.*

- 2) *Perumal Swami had voluntarily relinquished the job of ashram manager in 1922. Since that date (the court action was initiated in 1933) he had neither lived in the ashram nor taken any part in its management.*

Although Perumal Swami's claim was clearly spurious, Bhagavan was ordered to appear in court to answer the charges. A British diplomat called Grant Duff who was a devotee of Bhagavan persuaded the British authorities that Bhagavan was a harmless soul who should not be made to appear in court. Instead, he arranged for the court to hear Bhagavan's testimony in the ashram itself.

When the lawyers came we were all allowed to listen to the proceedings. Bhagavan's answers were so interesting that I made a point of writing some of them down in my diary.

**Lawyer:** Swami, what is your name?

**Bhagavan:** People have called me by many different names. Which of them is to be called mine? (laughter)

**Lawyer:** Nowadays people call you Ramana Maharshi. Is this not correct?

**Bhagavan:** Yes.

**Lawyer:** According to the Hindu *sāstras* there are four *āśramas*: *brahmacharya*, *grihastha*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*. Which *āśrama* are you in?

**Bhagavan:** I am in the *ativarnāśrama*. This transcends the other *āśramas*.

*Traditional Hinduism recognises four stages of life which are called āśramas: brahmacharya, in which one leads a celibate life and studies religious works; grihastha, in which one gets married and leads the life of a householder; vānaprastha, in which one retires from the world and devotes one's time to meditation; sannyāsa, in which one renounces all ties with one's family and the world. Life in each āśrama is governed by certain traditional rules and regulations.*

*Ativarnāśrama means 'beyond all castes and āśramas'. Since this is not one of the four traditional āśramas, the lawyer asked Bhagavan if such a state was mentioned in the scriptures. Anna-*

*malai Swami omitted to write this question down but it was recorded in the court transcript. Bhagavan replied by citing the Sūta Samhitā, a sub-division of the Skanda Purāna, as an authority on this āsrama (see Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, no. 291).*

*The Sūta Samhitā is a highly revered text: Adi-Sankara (9th century) is supposed to have read it eighteen times before he began to work on his famous commentaries. In the part of the Sūta Samhitā known as the Mukti Kanda, verses 14–30 of chapter five describe and define the state of ativarnāśrama. Verses 29 and 30 summarise Bhagavan's position:*

*By realising his own Self, the restrictions imposed by varn-āśrama dharma [caste duties and obligations] drop away of their own accord. Such a person transcends the barriers of āśramas and varnas [castes] and remains in his own Self. Thus, a person, by transcending all the āśramas and varnas and remaining in his own Self, is declared to be an ativarn-āśrami by all the vedantic experts.*

**Lawyer:** If that is true, are there any rules for this āśrama?

**Bhagavan:** The *ativarnāśrama* is without any rules.

**Lawyer:** Do you have any desires for things of this world?

**Bhagavan:** There is no hatred for anything in the world.

*Part of this answer seems to be missing. In the version made by the court's stenographer Bhagavan replied, 'I have no desire to acquire properties, but properties come and I accept them. I admit that it is worldly to keep properties but I do not hate the affairs of the world.' (Transcript of O.S. 30/36, District Munsif, Tiruvannamalai, 15th November, 1936.)*

**Lawyer:** Each day many people come to see you. Why do they come?

**Bhagavan:** Each person has his own reason for coming. I don't tell them to come, to go or to stay.

**Lawyer:** Do you have any enemies?

**Bhagavan:** There are neither enemies nor friends for me.

**Lawyer:** Who is your Guru?

**Bhagavan:** There is neither Guru nor disciple for me.

**Lawyer:** Can one achieve anything without a Guru?

**Bhagavan:** Indeed one cannot.

**Lawyer:** Then who is your Guru?

**Bhagavan:** For me Self itself is the Guru.

**Lawyer:** Do you handle money?

**Bhagavan:** No.

**Lawyer:** People say that you are the incarnation of Lord Subramania [one of the Hindu gods].

**Bhagavan:** That and all gods are only me. (laughter)

**Lawyer:** Perumal Swami has written in his diary that you are an *avatāra* [incarnation] of Lord Subramania. [The lawyer then showed Bhagavan a verse in Perumal Swami's diary.] This verse says that you are Subramania. Is the handwriting yours?

**Bhagavan:** The handwriting is mine but the idea was Perumal Swami's.

*Bhagavan composed this verse while he was living in Virupaksha Cave. At that time several of Bhagavan's devotees got into the habit of writing verses in praise of Bhagavan. Perumal Swami complained to Bhagavan that he felt left out because he was unable to compose verses of this kind. Bhagavan helped him out by composing this verse, praising himself as Subramania, and writing it in Perumal Swami's diary. At the end of the verse he wrote the name 'Perumal Swami' to indicate that Perumal Swami could claim authorship if he wanted to. It seems that Bhagavan's idea was that whenever one of the scholar-devotees came and composed a verse which praised Bhagavan, Perumal Swami could recite this verse and claim it as his own. The verse says:*

*The six-faced Lord who came on earth borne by Mother Azhagu and Sundaram in Tiruchuzhi in order to remove the defects of his devotees by saying 'Fear not,' who bears twelve hands in order to bestow his own state by destroying the karmas of those seeking refuge at his feet, who having subdued the five senses rides upon the peacock of the elevated mind-lotus, and who plays the game of throwing the spear which is the glance of jñāna, he is indeed the Lord who blissfully abides as Arunamalai-Ramana.*

*The translation is taken from The Mountain Path, 1984, page 94. The six-faced Lord is Subramania; Azhagu and Sundaram are Bhagavan's parents; Tiruchuzhi is Bhagavan's birth place; the twelve hands, the spear and the peacock are iconographical features of Subramania.*

*Many of Bhagavan's devotees believed that Bhagavan was an incarnation of Subramania. Although Bhagavan appears to make*

*this claim for himself in the verse, it should be remembered that he was writing it from Perumal Swami's standpoint, not his own. Perumal Swami was one of the people who believed that Bhagavan really was a divine incarnation. Bhagavan indicates this when he says, 'The handwriting is mine but the idea was Perumal Swami's'. Bhagavan himself never made any such claim. The lawyer who asked the question was presumably hoping that he could discredit Bhagavan by forcing him to admit that he was claiming to be an incarnation of a Hindu God.*

**Lawyer:** You said that you belong to *ativarnāśrama*. Do you know of anyone else who is in this state?

**Bhagavan:** No.

**Lawyer:** Was there anyone in the past?

**Bhagavan:** Sukha, Jadabharata [sages of ancient India] and a few others.

**Lawyer:** Why do different people say different things about your ashram?

**Bhagavan:** Because each person's mind perceives it differently.

**Lawyer:** Do you have any special love for your brother?

**Bhagavan:** I love him in the same way that I love all people.

**Lawyer:** Who receives the donations that come to the ashram?

**Bhagavan:** They are all given in my name but I am not alone in using them. All the people here share them.

**Lawyer:** If Perumal Swami wants to stay in the ashram again, will you permit him to stay?

**Bhagavan:** If he undertakes to behave like all the other devotees he will be permitted to stay.

**Lawyer:** If people want to stay in the ashram, whom do they have to ask?

**Bhagavan:** It's not my work. They have to contact the *sarvādhi-kārī*.

**Lawyer:** Was Perumal Swami the manager of Skandashram?

**Bhagavan:** He was managing while I was in Skandashram, but even there his conduct was not good. He squandered a lot of money.

*A transcript of Bhagavan's answers (not the questions) was made by a resident devotee at the time of the interview. This manuscript, hand-written and covering seventeen foolscap pages, is stored in the files of the Sri Ramanasramam office. The version in*

*Annamalai Swami's diary is very similar to this manuscript although it is much shorter and the order of the questions has been changed a little. Other partial records of the interrogation can be found in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (nos. 281 and 291) and The Brunton Manuscript. The account in Annamalai Swami's diary ends with the answer 'Because each person's mind perceives it differently'. Some of the subsequent questions and answers, which he remembered when I interviewed him but did not write down at the time of the court hearing, do not appear in any of the other records. It is possible that he heard Bhagavan make these remarks on a different occasion.*

There were many other questions, mostly about management matters. The lawyer who asked the questions was unnecessarily disrespectful and argumentative. Within a few weeks his son went mad and started to wander around the streets of Tiruvannamalai carrying human excrement in his hands. Then the lawyer himself went mad. Both he and his son died a short time later. Many devotees felt that this happened because he was so disrespectful towards Bhagavan.

Perumal Swami lost the case but he continued his campaign against the ashram by publishing a small book entitled *Ramana Maharshiyin Nija Swarūpam* [*The Real Nature of Ramana Maharshi*]. It accused Bhagavan of sexual misconduct with his female devotees and gave a long list of all his character defects. Chinnaswami wanted to take legal action against Perumal Swami but Bhagavan dissuaded him from doing so.

*When Bhagavan read this section about his character defects he laughed and said, 'Why didn't he come to me before writing all this? I could have told him about many more of my defects, things which I alone know.'*

*At the end of the book, which was fairly brief, there was a note from Perumal Swami which read: 'I could tell many other stories about Bhagavan's bad character but unfortunately I do not have enough money to print them all.'*

*When Bhagavan read this he laughed again and remarked, 'Why didn't he come to us if he was short of money? We could have given him a donation.'*

*Perumal Swami was hoping that a court case would publicise his book. When the ashram refused to make any response he tried to*

*initiate legal action himself by pretending to be an aggrieved devotee. Devaraja Mudaliar, one of Bhagavan's lawyer-devotees, was asked by Bhagavan to take up the matter on behalf of the ashram. Mudaliar succeeded in getting the case stopped before any court proceedings started. A brief account of this episode can be found on page twelve of his memoir, My Recollections.*

I mentioned this book to Bhagavan while I was once helping him with his bath.

Bhagavan remarked, 'Let the book be sold in front of the ashram gate'.

Bhagavan was half serious and half joking when he said this.

He went on to explain: 'If ordinary people read this book they will believe it and be deterred from entering the ashram. Good devotees, who will not believe such nonsense, will continue to visit.'

Bhagavan didn't like large crowds of people visiting him. He had the idea that if his reputation and good name slipped, the number of visitors would decrease.

*From The Brunton Manuscript, p. 113: 'A disciple was once excited because someone in town spoke depreciatingly of Bhagavan.*

*'Maharshi said: "I permit him to do so. Let him say even more. Let others follow suit. Only let them leave me alone. If anyone cares to believe all these scandalous words I shall consider it a great service done to me, because if he [Perumal Swami] persuades people to think that I am a false Swami, they will no longer come to visit me and then I shall be able to have a quiet life. I want to be left alone, therefore I welcome the libellous pamphlet. Patience, more patience—tolerance, more tolerance."'*

Perumal Swami's capacity for mischief was seemingly endless. After a few months respite he found a new way to harass the ashram. At that time the ashram buildings were located on a plot of land which was owned by an institution called the Bavaji Math. The head of this *math* lived in Tiruvannamalai. He had given the ashram permission to use the land because he had a high regard for Bhagavan. On one occasion, when he had come for *darshan*, he had said that he was very happy that a *mahātmā* was living on his land. The ashram had once tried to buy the land from him but it

was not successful because there was a clause in the title deed which forbade the Bavaji Math from selling it.

When Perumal Swami lost his first case against the ashram he somehow persuaded the head of this *math* to start another case against Bhagavan. The *mathādhipati* [the head of the *math*] petitioned the local court, asking it to order Bhagavan to leave his land. I don't know how Perumal Swami persuaded him to start this case. Because of the high respect that the *mathādhipati* had previously had for Bhagavan, I can only assume that he was bribed in some way. This case was not as troublesome as the other one. After a deputation was sent to negotiate with the *mathādhipati* the whole affair was amicably settled out of court. Under the terms of the agreement Sri Ramanasramam purchased a plot of land in Tiruvannamalai which was exactly the same size as the plot on which the ashram buildings were located. This newly-purchased plot was given to the Bavaji Math in exchange for the plot which the ashram was using.

This was Perumal Swami's last serious attempt to inconvenience the ashram. Soon afterwards his health deteriorated to such an extent that he spent the last twenty years of his life as a house-bound invalid. As the years passed and his illnesses increased he began to realise how badly he had behaved. On one of his last visits to the ashram (he arrived in a horse cart because he was too sick to walk) he came to the hall and spoke to Bhagavan.

'Bhagavan,' he said, 'I will go to hell because I have done a lot of bad things. Please forgive me and don't forget me.'

Bhagavan replied, 'Even if you forget me, I shall not forget you'.

'But I'll be in hell!' exclaimed Perumal Swami.

Bhagavan looked at him for a while and then said, 'I am present there also'.

In his last days Perumal Swami was deserted by all his friends and cheated out of all his money. During this period he lived for a time in the house of a man called Mudaliar. This man borrowed all Perumal Swami's money and then refused to pay him back. When Mudaliar realised that Perumal Swami had no more money to give him, he tried to throw him out of his house. He called a horse-cart, put Perumal Swami in it and told the driver to take him to Sri Ramanasramam.

'I am sending you to Sri Ramanasramam,' he said. 'Many

people are eating there without paying anything. You served them for many years so they are sure to look after you.'

After saying this he told the cart driver to put him just inside the gate and then leave as quickly as possible.

The ashram authorities refused to accept delivery of Mudaliar's consignment. They hired another horse-cart and sent him straight back to Mudaliar's house. Mudaliar, who didn't want him back, refused to let him in. Instead, he hired yet another cart and told the driver to deposit Perumal Swami back in the ashram again. The ashram again refused to accept him, and again sent him back to Mudaliar's house. Mudaliar finally admitted defeat and permitted Perumal Swami to stay with him again.

Perumal Swami finally died in the 1950s, alone and uncared for, on a stone bench somewhere in town. Very few people had any sympathy for him at the time. Just about everyone came to the conclusion that all his troubles came about as a result of the campaigns he had waged against Bhagavan.

## Building Works—II

Throughout the 1930s, up till 1938, I was engaged more or less full-time on building work. The biggest job that I undertook during this period was supervising the construction of the new dining room and kitchen. About 30–40 masons were working there every day on a building that was about twenty-five yards square. Fortunately, Bhagavan took a keen interest in the building, guiding me at all stages of the work. In the evening, when I went to give him my daily report, he would tell me what work should be done the following day. If there were any difficult jobs to do he would explain how to do them.

One of the first things I had to do was demolish my own room. There were about ten coconut-leaf huts, including my own, on the site of the new kitchen. These all had to be dismantled and erected elsewhere. At about the same time a room with a tiled roof was built in front of the storeroom. I moved into this room and stayed there for many years.

One day, when the construction of the dining room was in full swing, there was a heavy storm which prevented me from getting any plans from Bhagavan. At that time I was in the habit of talking to Bhagavan about building matters when he came out of the dining room after his evening meal. That night, because of the rain, he went straight to the hall without talking to me. I never got another chance to speak to him that evening because at that time Bhagavan didn't like to discuss his plans in public.

The next morning, before the work started, I went to Bhagavan and asked him, 'What is the plan for today?'

Bhagavan replied, 'Swami is within you. Go and do the work.'

This was something of a shock for me because I had become accustomed to depend on Bhagavan for advice. In a way, Bhagavan was actually paying me a compliment. His refusal to help me indicated that he was now satisfied that I had learned enough to manage the construction on my own. Before I went to the site and issued my instructions I uttered a silent prayer to Bhagavan, asking him to guide me in the work. At about 9 a.m. Bhagavan came out of the hall to see what I was doing. After

inspecting the work he gave me a 'building diploma' by smiling and uttering the single word '*Beish!*' which means 'Well done!'

There were two small incidents, both connected with the construction of the dining room, which are worth recounting. The first is a good example of how Bhagavan disliked devotees showing him special attention. I was out in the sun, supervising the unloading of some lime. I had an umbrella to protect me from the sun and dark glasses to protect me from the lime dust. When Bhagavan came to see what I was doing, I removed my sandals and lowered my umbrella as a mark of respect. Bhagavan immediately told me off.

'Why do you do these things when you see me? Why are you giving me special attention like this? These things are to protect you from the sun and the dust. I will only come to see you in future if you promise to keep your umbrella up and your sandals on.'

The second incident is more curious. I was supervising work on the dining room when I became aware that my ego was getting very strong. I could feel an unwanted sense of pride and achievement growing within me.

'I am responsible for all this! I alone am supervising this great work!'

While I was afflicted with these strong thoughts Bhagavan came to see me. Before he reached me I saw a black, shadow-like cloud leave my body. As soon as it left I could feel that my egotistic thoughts had departed with it. I told Bhagavan about this strange event.

He confirmed that something unusual had happened by quoting a well-known Tamil proverb: 'The bad spirits will leave when they see the priest.'

Prior to the construction of the dining room, Bhagavan always made a point of giving me his building instructions when no one else was listening. Because no one ever saw Bhagavan speak to me about building matters some devotees came to the conclusion that I was following my own plans, not Bhagavan's. I was very unpopular with this group for a long time because they all felt that I was wasting the ashram's money by constructing excessively large buildings. I could never disprove their claim because, for the first few years that I was supervising the construction, Bhagavan never once publicly admitted that he was giving plans to me.

For some reason Bhagavan wanted his own role in the building programme to be kept a secret.

Several times he told me, 'Don't tell anyone that I told you to do this, just carry out the work. Also, don't tell people what you intend to do in the future. If people come to know what you are planning to do next, they will come along with their own ideas and try to get you to adopt them. If this sort of thing happens you will probably get confused.'

Bhagavan even told me how to avoid having to answer questions.

'If engineers come up to you and ask you how you are going to carry out all this work, tell them, "I am very busy at the moment. I haven't got time to explain." Then walk off and start doing some work. There are many people here who are interested in this building work. They will all want to come and tell you their plans. If you start listening to them, it will only make your job more difficult.'

This policy of total secrecy changed soon after Major Chadwick came to the ashram. Chadwick often came to watch me work, and when Bhagavan and I made our inspection tours at midday he would often accompany us. Bhagavan used to give me instructions during these tours because at that time of day we could be alone on the site. Bhagavan continued to give me plans when Chadwick started to join us for our midday stroll. When Chadwick later came to hear that there were many people in the ashram who believed that I was acting on my own authority, he made a point of telling everyone that he had personally witnessed Bhagavan giving me instructions. Once the 'secret' became public knowledge, Bhagavan abandoned the pretense that he was not involved in the planning and began to give me instructions openly in the hall.

Prior to this change I had experienced a lot of difficulty with the office staff and some of the other ashram workers. Those who thought that I was wasting money on grandiose schemes of my own refused to cooperate with me when I needed assistance. For example, there were always about 6-8 people working full-time in the ashram's garden, but if I ever asked any of them for help the supervisor would refuse to let them come. In fact, at one time my standing in the ashram was so low, nobody was willing to assist me. I had to rely exclusively on paid labourers.

Once during this period, when I was eating iddies with Bhagavan, he told me, 'Before the masons come this morning, I want you to move some big stones'.

When Bhagavan told me which ones they were, I immediately knew that it wasn't a job for one person.

‘How can I do this work?’ I asked Bhagavan. ‘It needs more than one person. The people in the office will not permit any of the ashram’s workers to assist me.’

‘In that case,’ said Bhagavan, ‘I shall come and help you myself.’

When the people in the office heard that Bhagavan had volunteered to do some heavy manual labour because no one else could be found to do the work, they immediately sent a man called Muni Swami to help me. Since it soon became known that Bhagavan himself wanted the work to be done, and done quickly, another man called Danupillai also came to assist me. The three of us, with a little help from Raghavendra Rao, managed to get the work done before the masons arrived.

I experienced a similar lack of cooperation from the kitchen staff. I had no problems with food myself since both Bhagavan and Chinnaswami had told the kitchen staff that I could take anything I wanted from the kitchen. However, the kitchen workers had received orders that they should not give food to any of the workers that I hired. This was a special rule which applied only to my workers. Workers who were engaged to do other ashram jobs were permitted to eat in the dining room.

One day one of my workers turned up and told me that he had not eaten that morning. He was hoping that the ashram would give him some breakfast. This particular man had a very important job to do that day. Until it was finished none of the other workers could proceed with their own work.

To keep this particular man happy I went to the kitchen and told the women there, ‘I am hungry again. Please give me some more iddies.’

One of the women said, ‘But you have only just eaten. Why are you asking for more?’

At this point I heard Bhagavan give a loud laugh. He had been working in a part of the kitchen that I could not see.

I felt unable to lie again with Bhagavan listening to me so I told the woman, ‘You will only give them to me if I tell you that I am going to eat them. Really, they are for one of my workers.’

Bhagavan then appeared with a big smile on his face and instructed her to give me the iddies that I had asked for.

We all regarded Bhagavan as a totally honest and truthful person, so it was with great surprise that I once listened to him tell

me that he himself had told three lies since the day he had left home to come to Arunachala. The first, he said, was at Muthukrishna Bhagavata's house while he was still on his way to Arunachala. In that place he had said, incorrectly, that he had lost all his money and possessions.

*At Muthukrishna Bhagavata's house he had pawned his earrings in order to get money to continue his journey to Tiruvannamalai. He had not lost his possessions—he simply didn't have enough money to complete the journey.*

The second lie was told on a day when his mother was staying with him in Pavalakundru.

*Pavalakundru is a temple situated on a small outcrop of rock about 300 yards from the main Arunachaleswara Temple. Bhagavan lived there for some time in the 1890s. This story must have taken place on one of his later visits because his mother did not come to stay with him until 1915. S.S. Cohen (Guru Ramana, pp. 13–14) appears to have written about this incident, but he locates it at Skandashram. When I mentioned this to Annamalai Swami he told me that he was certain that Bhagavan had told him that it took place at Pavalakundru.*

While Bhagavan was sitting inside the temple, apparently in some kind of *samādhi* state, his mother decided to go and visit Echammal in town. Before she left she decided to lock Bhagavan inside the temple so that no one would be able to disturb or harm him. Bhagavan was not really in *samādhi*, he was just sitting with his eyes closed. As soon as his mother left he put his arm through a hole in the door, released the bolt, and let himself out. Having gained his freedom in this way he bolted the door again. When his mother returned she was shocked to see him sitting outside the bolted door. Bhagavan could see that she thought that he had acquired some special *siddhi* [power] which enabled him to pass through solid matter. As a joke he confirmed her suspicions.

When she asked, 'How did you get out?' he looked very solemn and replied, 'Through the *ākāśa* [space or ether]'.

The third lie was uttered at Skandashram. Once when Bhagavan's mother was suffering from ear ache, Bhagavan asked her to tilt her head so that he could see inside her ear. There was nothing to see, but when Bhagavan peered into her ear he pretended to see

a wasp there. He gave his mother a brief running commentary on its activities.

‘There’s a wasp crawling round in there. It’s coming out. It’s standing near the entrance now. Now it’s flown away!’

His mother was so convinced that this imaginary wasp was the cause of her pain, when Bhagavan said, ‘It’s flown away!’ the pain completely disappeared.

I had hired both men and women to work on the dining room. Some of the women were quite attractive and I must confess that I was occasionally troubled by sexual desires. I had talked to Bhagavan about this problem quite early in my career in the ashram.

I had told him, ‘I don’t want *mōksha* [liberation]. I just want that the desire for women should not enter my mind.’

On that occasion Bhagavan had laughed and said, ‘All the *mahātmās* [great souls] are striving only for this’.

His answer reassured me that I was not alone in suffering from this problem but it gave no clue as to how I might overcome it. I formed a theory that if I didn’t have to watch the women work all day it would be a lot easier to avoid sexual thoughts. In those days we used to pay the men workers four annas a day and the women workers three annas [an anna was a sixteenth part of a rupee]. It occurred to me that if I replaced all the women workers with men workers, for the price of a few annas I would be able to purchase a little peace of mind. I therefore told the women that there would be no more work for them in future.

That night Bhagavan, as usual, enquired what work I planned to do the following day.

I told him, ‘The foundation walls have already been completed. Tomorrow I intend to put a lot of sand inside the building to bring the ground up to the level of the dining room floor.’

Bhagavan then enquired, ‘How many men and how many women have you engaged?’

I told Bhagavan that I had not hired any women and I explained my reasons to him. Bhagavan was not at all impressed with my explanation. He saw no reason why the women should suffer merely because I was unable to control my mind.

‘Why did you say that women workers were no longer needed?’ he asked. ‘You engage women workers. You engage women workers. You engage women workers.’

I had noticed before that when Bhagavan wanted to stress the importance of a particular idea or phrase he would repeat it three times. I followed his instructions and rehired all the women.

I can remember another occasion when my sexual thoughts almost got the better of me. It was about 1 p.m. in the middle of summer. I was sitting in front of the storeroom door when I saw a very beautiful woman come for Bhagavan's *darshan*. A few minutes later she came out of the hall and started walking towards the hill. I was so captivated by her appearance that I was wondering whether she was a goddess in human form. I felt a strong sexual desire arise within me. At that moment Bhagavan suddenly appeared and saw what state my mind was in. He called me outside and asked me to stand in the sun on a big rock which was near the storeroom. Because I had no sandals on, the heat from the rock caused a great pain in my feet. Bhagavan completely ignored my discomfort. For several minutes he calmly chatted about various building matters. The pain in my burning feet became almost unbearable but I didn't dare to move because Bhagavan had specifically told me to stand on that rock. After some time the thought occurred to me that the pain I was experiencing had completely displaced the desire for this woman. As soon as this thought entered my mind Bhagavan abruptly terminated our conversation and walked away. I happily took my burning feet back into the shade. Bhagavan's treatment proved to be a complete cure. When the pain subsided I found that I had no further interest in the woman.

It is one of Bhagavan's characteristics that he often responded to identical situations in different ways. In 1938, when I was once again troubled by sexual desires, he reacted in a completely different way. For three days my mind had been filled with sexual thoughts, so much so that I began to think, 'How will I ever attain salvation if thoughts like these constantly come?'

I was so disturbed by these thoughts that throughout these three days I was unable to eat or sleep properly. Finally, I decided that Bhagavan was the only person who could help me. That evening I followed Bhagavan when he went out for his walk and explained my problem to him.

'Since this desire for women came to me the other day, I have not slept or taken food for the last three days. As these thoughts occur quite often, what will eventually happen to me?'

Bhagavan, after remaining silent for a couple of minutes, replied, 'Why should you always be thinking that an evil thought occurred at such and such a time in the past? If you instead meditate "To whom does this thought come?" it will fly away of its own accord. You are not the body or the mind, you are the Self. Meditate on this and all your desires will leave you.'

On many occasions while the construction work was going on Bhagavan would come and sit on a stone and supervise whatever we were doing. Sometimes he even joined in himself.

He often used to say, 'When I am outside I am more healthy. That six-feet-long sofa you people make me sit on is just like a jail for me.'

Bhagavan often spent hours in our company. When a supervising mood came to him he would only go back to the hall if he were told that some new devotees had come for his *darshan*. On these occasions Madhava Swami, who looked after the hall in Bhagavan's absence, would come and tell us that some new people had come. I remember one occasion when Bhagavan spotted Madhava Swami coming towards us. He was obviously coming to tell Bhagavan that some new people had come.

Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'A new warrant is coming for my arrest. I have to go back to jail.'

Bhagavan always welcomed an opportunity to join in the work. I can give one good example of this from my early days in the ashram. In those days there was nowhere to store the ashram's rice bags safely. They needed a waterproof platform in case the ground got wet. Bhagavan asked me to make such a platform out of bricks and cement in a small hut which used to be located on the site of the old office. After I had completed the work I started to smooth the surface with an old brick to make it completely level. Bhagavan selected another brick and joined me in the work. He held it in both hands and started to scrape very vigorously.

I tried to stop him from working by saying, 'Why is Bhagavan doing this work? I can easily do all this scraping.'

'I am doing it because I need the exercise,' replied Bhagavan. 'If I do some work my body will get stronger. I have no appetite at the moment. If I do some work I will get hungry. My gas problem may also go if I do a lot of exercise.'

I didn't try to dissuade him again because it was clear that he was enjoying himself enormously.

Since Bhagavan was usually excluded by us from doing vigorous ashram chores, he kept healthy by going for frequent walks on the hill. In the 1940s he even combined this with a daily programme of keep-fit exercises to improve his digestion. He would put his arms above his head, keep his legs straight, bend at the waist, and try to touch his toes. He would do this about thirty times every morning. Normally, he would do these exercises in a place where people could not see him, but on a few occasions he was spotted by the women woodcutters who roamed the hill in search of firewood.

One of them, after watching Bhagavan's repeated forward bends, remarked, 'Bhagavan has eaten too much food in the ashram. He is trying to vomit it up.'

Another woman with a more fertile imagination disagreed.

'No, these are special exercises. Bhagavan is taking stones from the hill and turning them into gold. He is using the gold to finance the building of the Mother's Temple. How else could he pay for it? This man you see next to him [Bhagavan's attendant] acts as a watchman. He makes sure that no one disturbs Bhagavan while he is making the gold. Also he stops other people from stealing it and helps to carry it back to the ashram.'

The ashram's increasing prosperity in the 1940s was widely discussed by the local people. Many of them, who had no idea about how the ashram was really financed, came to the conclusion that the ashram management was counterfeiting money to finance its growth. I heard many non-devotees advance this theory. Once, while I was standing near the ashram office, I saw one of the local villagers watching Mauni Srinivasa Rao do some typing. The villager, who had never seen a typewriter before, came to the conclusion that this must be the machine which produced all the counterfeit notes. There was a luggage room near the office where devotees could deposit their bags before going to *darshan*. Because this room always had a watchman outside to guard the visiting devotees' property, many of the local villagers came to the conclusion that this must have been the room where the money was made and stored.

Bhagavan went on these frequent walks partly to improve his digestion and partly to relieve the stiffness in his knees. Even in my early days at the ashram I had noticed that Bhagavan had rheumatic swellings and pains in his knees. As the years went by

the problem got worse and worse. Bhagavan had a standard joke about this which he repeated on several occasions.

He would say, 'Hanuman caught the feet of Rama, whereas his father has caught my feet'.

In Hindu mythology Hanuman's father is Vayu, the god of wind. Hanuman, the monkey king, is one of Rama's foremost devotees. In Tamil we always say that there is *vāyu* in the leg when it starts to swell up.

Bhagavan's attendants regularly massaged his knees with oil but it didn't make much difference. The pain was so severe that his attendants had to put a cushion under his knees because it was too painful for him to sit with his legs straight. If one looks at the famous picture that is now on the sofa in the old hall, one can see how the cushions were used to support his bent legs. Bhagavan allowed his attendants to massage him but he had more faith in exercise as a pain reliever.

He used to say, 'If I don't go for a walk every day there will be pain in the legs'.

I was once massaging Bhagavan's feet with some oil when an old lady came and asked me what the problem was.

I told her, 'I am massaging Bhagavan's feet because there is some pain there'.

The woman scoffed at my explanation.

'Bhagavan does not experience any pain,' she said. 'You are only purifying your sins by doing this.'

When Bhagavan tried to help us with our daily chores, he ran into a lot of opposition from the resident devotees. Most of us felt that we were not showing him proper respect if we permitted him to do menial work. One day, for example, during my first years in the ashram, the devotees held an informal meeting to divide up all the work that needed to be done that day. One person volunteered to do the cooking, one person the cleaning and so on.

At the end of the meeting Bhagavan, who had not been given any job to do, announced, 'There is one job that you have forgotten to allocate. No one has been appointed to wash clothes. If you all give me your clothes I will take them to Yama Teertham and wash them all.'

No one wanted Bhagavan to do this work. We allocated the washing job to someone else and left him unemployed.

*Yama Teertham is a tank about a mile from the ashram. In Indian English a 'tank' is any man-made structure larger than a well which has been built to hold rainwater. Yama Teertham contains water throughout the year, whereas the tanks nearer the ashram often dry up in summer. It is therefore reasonable to infer that this incident took place in summer. In winter the washing would have been done nearby.*

Sometimes, though, Bhagavan would successfully plan and execute works by himself. He once decided to build a shelf out of bricks and mud in an alcove in the old kitchen. He had planned to store vessels containing pickles there. Bhagavan himself dug up the earth with the aid of a six-foot-long *kadappārai* [crowbar]. Santammal, one of the cooks, then made mud out of it. Bhagavan was doing the work himself, rather than giving it to me, because non-brahmins were not allowed in the kitchen. I was doing some work in the dining room that adjoined the kitchen but I couldn't see what Bhagavan was doing because a very orthodox brahmin lady was holding a sari across the entrance to the kitchen. She obviously thought that since I was a non-brahmin I should not even be allowed to look at what went on in the kitchen.

When Bhagavan looked up from his brick-laying and saw what she was doing he said, 'Why are you holding that sari like that? It is only our Annamalai Swami.'

At that moment Chinna-swami suddenly appeared. He smiled at me and said, 'Bhagavan has given you a new title, 'Ishta Brahmin' [a well-liked brahmin].

I should mention, by way of explanation, that while Bhagavan maintained caste orthodoxy in cooking matters, primarily for the sake of his brahmin devotees who would not otherwise eat at the ashram, he tended to disapprove of some of its extreme manifestations.

There was one other type of exercise that Bhagavan liked to indulge in—making walking sticks. He would sometimes do this when there were no other demands on his time or attention. I once saw him make several of them in a very energetic way. Chinna-swami had purchased a small bundle of firewood, and Bhagavan had asked his attendants to select four or five straight sticks. He first cleaned the outer surface of these sticks with a small knife, then rubbed them with pieces of glass. The final smoothing was

done with a leaf. The sawdust fell all over Bhagavan's body. Some of it stayed where it fell. Other particles were carried away by the little rivers of sweat that flowed over his body.

I tried to fan him but Bhagavan stopped me by saying, 'I am working to make the sweat come. When the sweat is allowed to flow in an unimpeded manner, the body will be healthy. If you fan like this all the sweat will go away.'

Because there was no electric fan in those days, all the fanning had to be done by hand. Usually, when people started to fan him, Bhagavan would tell them to stop. Some devotees though, such as Mudaliar Patti, were very persistent in their attempts to fan him. Once, in the middle of summer, when Bhagavan's body was glistening with sweat, I saw Bhagavan pluck a fan out of Mudaliar Patti's hands because she was surreptitiously trying to fan him. He had already said 'No fan' to her a few minutes before.

As he took away the fan he repeated his usual reprimand: 'Sweating freely is good for the body. Why are you trying to stop it by fanning me?'

Before my arrival, when there had not been much activity in the ashram, Bhagavan had spent most of his time sitting in the hall. He had regularly worked in the kitchen and had gone for walks on the hill but for most of the day he had led a fairly sedentary existence. All this changed once the building programme started. He frequently came out to see what we were doing, he bombarded us with advice and instructions, and he occasionally joined in the work himself. Some people have the idea that the ashram spontaneously grew up around Bhagavan, without any intervention from him. These people would have soon changed their views if they had seen Bhagavan at work in the 1930s. It was Bhagavan, and Bhagavan alone, who decided when buildings should be built, where they should be built, on what scale they should be constructed, what materials should be used, and who should be in charge of the construction.

Bhagavan used to say, 'I am not concerned with any of the activities here. I just witness all that happens.'

From the standpoint of the Self this might be true. But from the relative standpoint I can say that no stone was ever moved in the ashram without his knowledge and consent. As I have mentioned before, the only area he refused to get involved in was

finance. He would start projects when there was no money available to pay for them, blithely ignoring all Chinnaswami's predictions of imminent financial doom. He never asked anyone for money and he forbade Chinnaswami from begging for donations in the name of the ashram; yet, somehow, enough donations came to complete every building.

Chinnaswami, who felt that he was ultimately responsible for all the ashram's finances, tended to worry a lot when Bhagavan embarked on schemes which had no proper financial foundation.

On such occasions I often heard Bhagavan remark, 'I am here, it is not necessary for him to worry'.

Whenever Bhagavan spoke like this I would convey the message to Chinnaswami. Such messages used to cheer him up temporarily, but his newly-found confidence would usually dissipate whenever the next big bill arrived.

Bhagavan expected devotees to be equally unconcerned with the ashram's finances. Though he permitted devotees to donate to the ashram if they felt like it, he did not want the donors to become involved in the ashram's financial affairs. Once, for example, when Bhagavan was very sick, Maurice Frydman gave Rs. 1,000 to Chinnaswami and asked him to use it to buy fruit for Bhagavan. In those days this was a very large amount of money. Chinnaswami, knowing that Bhagavan would not eat fruit unless everyone else was given an equal share, decided that it would be a waste of money to buy fruit every day for everyone in the ashram. A few months later Frydman came and asked Chinnaswami if the money had been spent as he requested. Chinnaswami got angry with him and told him that the ashram expenditures were none of his business. On this occasion Bhagavan supported Chinnaswami.

When Frydman came to the hall to complain that his donation had not been properly spent, Bhagavan said, rather angrily, 'When you give something, you should regard the matter as closed. How dare you use this gift to further your ego?'

For Bhagavan, actions themselves were neither good nor bad; he was always more concerned with the motives and the mental states that prompted them.

During the period that I was constructing the ashram's buildings several visiting engineers, who were also devotees, decided to offer their services by drawing up blueprints for the various buildings that were about to be constructed. Chinnaswami wanted

me to carry out these plans but it was not possible because there were different and contradictory plans for each of the buildings that he wanted me to construct. When our attempts to find satisfactory compromises only resulted in more confusion and delays in construction, I suggested that we give all the plans to Bhagavan and let him make the final decision. I took all the plans to the old hall but Bhagavan didn't even bother to unroll them.

Putting them to one side he remarked, 'Before we came here all these buildings had already been planned by a higher power. At each destined moment all things will happen according to that plan. So why should we bother with all these written plans?'

It was Bhagavan himself who drew up all the plans for the ashram buildings. Before each day's work started he would tell me what to do. If the instructions were complicated he would sometimes sketch a few lines on a piece of paper to clarify or illustrate what he was saying. These little diagrams were the only plans we ever had. Except for the Mother's Temple, which was built according to the plan of the chief *sthapati* [temple architect], and the storeroom, which was originally designed by a local building contractor, all the other buildings were constructed from Bhagavan's own informal plans.

When Bhagavan gave me a plan he would always say that it was only a suggestion. He never presumed to give me orders.

Usually he would say, 'This plan has just occurred to me. If you feel like doing it you can do it. Otherwise leave it.'

Of course, whenever Bhagavan spoke like this I took it as a direct order. I never refused a job and I never suggested that Bhagavan's plans should be altered in any way.

When the dining room and the kitchen were nearly finished, Chinnaswami came up to me with a secret plan of his own. He wanted me to build a room on the roof of the dining room for Bhagavan to stay in. He also wanted me to install a lift in the room which would connect it with the ground floor of the dining room. He wanted this arrangement so that devotees would have to get his permission to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. Only those who had secured his permission would be allowed to enter the lift.

Chinnaswami asked me to convey this plan to Bhagavan. After outlining the details he told me, 'You are going to Bhagavan's bathroom every day to help him with his bath. Bhagavan always gives his building plans directly to you. Go and discuss this matter

with Bhagavan and see if you can get his consent for this plan. If you can get him to agree to it I will give you a great title such as "Sir Annamalai Swami". Maybe I will even give you a greater one.'

The whole idea was utterly preposterous and I knew that Bhagavan would never consent to it. Many years before, when the owner of Virupaksha Cave had tried to control access to him, Bhagavan had responded by leaving the cave. I knew that he would never agree to any scheme which kept devotees away from him. Still, I thought there would be no harm in telling him what Chinna-swami's plan was. I intended to make it quite clear that it was not my idea.

As I approached the bathroom door later that day with the intention of telling Bhagavan this plan he called out to me, 'Stop! Don't come inside! Don't come today!'

I was shocked. In all the years that I had been helping Bhagavan with his bath I had never once been denied admission to the bathroom. I decided that this unusual order indicated that he knew why I was coming to see him. Furthermore, I felt that this refusal to see me meant that he was so opposed to the plan, he didn't even want to discuss it with me. I went back to Chinna-swami, explained what had happened, and told him that I didn't want anything more to do with the scheme because I was now certain that Bhagavan was completely opposed to the plan.

I added, 'If you want Bhagavan's approval, you must ask for it yourself'.

Chinna-swami admitted defeat. Since he was much too afraid of Bhagavan to approach him directly with such an outrageous scheme, the whole plan was dropped.

My relationship with Chinna-swami improved after the early quarrels over the storeroom and the cowshed. He still occasionally tried to give me instructions about the buildings, but since he knew that I was working directly under Bhagavan, he never complained very much when I refused to carry them out. He always had the strange notion that I could somehow simultaneously carry out two completely contradictory sets of instructions—his and Bhagavan's.

He used to tell me, 'Even though you are obeying Bhagavan's orders, you should also obey me'.

Chinna-swami always attempted to have complete control over everything that went on in the ashram. The fact that he had

virtually no control over the building projects or me irritated him enormously. This, I think, was the ultimate cause of all the disputes he had with me.

Although outwardly he kept up a facade of hostility, as the years went by he began to show a deep respect for my work and a kindly interest in my general welfare. He would often enquire about my health and he frequently reminded me to eat properly. He even gave instructions that hot water should be prepared for me so that I could have a hot bath at the end of each day.

He used to tell me, 'If you get sick, who will look after the work? You must eat properly and make sure that you get enough rest.'

As part of his campaign to keep me healthy he instructed the women in the kitchen to bring buttermilk to me at regular intervals while I was working.

Bhagavan had decided that the roof of the dining room should be done in a style called 'Madras Terrace'; that is, a flat roof with layers of brick and lime supported by wooden beams. On the day we started laying the bricks I engaged about thirty masons. For some reason, none of them seemed to be very interested in doing a good job.

When I first noticed how badly they were doing the work I told them, 'We will all go soon, but these buildings should remain for many years after we die. We should therefore try to make them as strong as possible.'

I had told all the masons, 'You must put the correct amount of lime between the bricks. If you don't the bricks will not be held firmly in place.'

The masons already knew this but many of them, including the head mason, were ignoring my instructions.

I eventually started shouting at the head mason: 'You are the head mason here! If you do not do the work properly, how can you expect your workers to do it the correct way?'

My shouting seemed to have little effect on the quality of the workmanship. By 10 a.m. I had shouted so much I had gone completely hoarse.

I went to see Bhagavan and croaked, 'I cannot supervise these men effectively any more. I have lost my voice from shouting too much. But if I don't shout at the workers they will not do the work properly.'

Bhagavan appreciated my problem. 'You go and have a rest,' he said. 'I shall attend to the work myself.'

Bhagavan left the hall, collected Chinnaswami and a man called Subramaniam, and went up to the roof to supervise the work. Subramaniam, who had a very loud voice, took over the job of 'chief shouter' while Bhagavan and Chinnaswami watched the workers to make sure that the job was done properly. With three people watching the brick-laying, the supervision was far more effective. The quality of the work improved and the job was soon completed.

In those days I often suffered from a sore throat because I had to shout a lot at the workers. Sampurnammal, one of the cooks, used to make a drink out of rice water, ghee and palm sugar and give it to me in a tumbler. She used to tell me that it would be good for the pain in my throat. I drank this mixture every day because I found, as Sampurnammal had said, that it was very effective in soothing throat pains.

She gave me this drink with such love and affection that one day I asked her, 'Did Bhagavan ask you to prepare this drink for me?'

She replied a little scornfully, 'For whom are you working? Is it necessary that Bhagavan should tell me to do a thing like this?'

I often had to get angry with the workers in order to get the work done. I discovered quite early in my career that if I didn't shout a lot the quantity and the quality of the work deteriorated. On one occasion I went too far and actually hit one of the workers because he had deliberately disobeyed me. It happened on a day when I was supervising work on the dining room. Early that morning, before the workers came, Bhagavan had asked me to tell the stonecutter to cut a stone 1½ feet long. The dimensions had to be exact because it was needed for a particular place in the dining room wall. Because Bhagavan had given me very precise orders about this stone, I told the stonecutter to be very careful when he cut it. I gave him detailed instructions on how to cut it in such a way that it would not break. While I was away supervising another job the stonecutter ignored all my instructions and broke the stone by trying to cut it in a different way. When I returned and saw what he had done I got so angry with him that I gave him a blow on the back.

This happened at about 9 a.m. For the rest of the day I felt very

guilty about losing my temper in this way. That evening, when I gave my daily report, I confessed to Bhagavan and apologised for my action.

Bhagavan asked me, 'When did this anger come and when did you hit him?'

I told him that the incident had happened about 9 a.m. that morning.

'The anger that came at 9 a.m. has already gone,' said Bhagavan. 'Why are you still thinking that you got angry and hit someone? Why are you still carrying these thoughts in your mind? Instead of feeling guilty about what you have done, enquire, "To whom did all this anger come?" Find out the real nature of the person who got angry this morning.

'For activity, that anger was needed. Now it is all over, you do not need to think about it any more. So drop that memory of anger and proceed with the next job.'

During my years at Ramanasramam Bhagavan himself twice hit me on the back but in each case it was in a spirit of playfulness rather than out of anger.

I received the first slap while we were standing in front of the old hall, discussing the construction of some new steps. It was a small job requiring about three *padi* of cement. A *padi* is a measure of about two litres.

When Bhagavan asked, 'How many steps should we have?' I thought that he was asking me about the quantity of cement because the word for steps in Tamil is also *padi*. I told him that three *padi* of cement would be sufficient to complete the work. Bhagavan asked about the number of steps three times, and three times I told him how much cement would be required.

Bhagavan eventually resolved the impasse by slapping me on the back and saying, 'I am talking about steps but you are talking about cement'. I saw my mistake immediately and we both had a good laugh about it.

I received my other hit a few years later. The ashram cooks had prepared a dish made out of *kambu*, a variety of millet.

While it was being eaten in the dining room Bhagavan asked Santammal, one of the ashram cooks, 'Where is Annamalai Swami?'

Santammal came to look for me and found me just outside the entrance to the dining room. She told me that *kambu* had been

prepared and that Bhagavan had apparently invited me to eat it by making enquiries about me. I entered the dining room and started to eat the food that was put in front of me. Because I arrived late for the meal I was still eating when everyone else got up to leave. As they were filing out Bhagavan stood next to me and watched me finish my portion.

While I was eating he pointed his stick at my plate and asked, 'Do you know what this is made of?'

When I said 'It's kambu,' Bhagavan seemed a little surprised. He thought that the main ingredient had been well disguised.

'How did you know it was made from kambu?' he asked.

I informed him that Santammal had told me about the food while she was inviting me to eat.

Bhagavan laughed and gave me a playful blow on the back with his stick, saying, 'This is also *kambu*'. [*Kambu* is also the Tamil word for 'stick'.]

One of the final jobs on the dining room was putting the name of the building on top of the eastern wall. The letters were to be constructed out of cement in a space about 2½ feet long and nine inches high. Bhagavan himself wrote the Tamil word *pākasālai*, meaning 'dining room', in big letters on a piece of paper. He wanted to show me how to shape and space out the letters so that all the available space would be used.

As he was carefully drafting this sign he told me, 'Today I felt that I couldn't sit still. I felt I had to do some work. So, I am making this plan for you. If you feel that you can make these letters out of cement, conforming to the shape, size and proportions that I have drawn here, then go ahead and do it. Otherwise you can leave it for someone else.'

A man called Srinivasa Rao who was watching all this came up to Bhagavan and said, 'He's just a country boy. He doesn't even know how to write properly. I will do this job for him.'

Bhagavan refused to let him take over. 'Don't interfere with his work,' he said. 'Go somewhere else and mind your own business.'

Since Bhagavan thus made it quite clear that he wanted me to do the work, I carried it out to the best of my ability. I put the date, 1938, at the top and the word *pākasālai* underneath in Tamil. Following another of Bhagavan's suggestions, I wrote the name Sri Ramanasramam underneath in *dēvanāgarī* script.

*Dēvanāgarī is the script used in Hindi and Sanskrit. The story which follows is about the construction of the ashram's vedic school. These institutions, known as Pāthasālās, teach knowledge of the Vēdas to brahmin boys.*

While the construction of the dining room was taking place I was also supervising the construction of the *Pāthasālā*. The original idea for this building had come from Raju Sastri, a local brahmin who was a devotee of Ganapati Muni. He had been visiting the ashram for several years in order to chant the *Vēdas* in front of the Mother's *samādhi*. Since he was a great believer in the vedic tradition he suggested to Chinnaśwami that the ashram should have a *Vēda Pāthasālā*. When Chinnaśwami and Bhagavan both agreed to the scheme I was appointed to supervise its construction.

Since it was a much easier job than the dining room I managed to construct it without any difficulty. The only curious incident I can recollect occurred shortly after the completion of the building. I went up to the flat roof, for no particular reason, and found Bhagavan rolling backwards and forwards on the ground. He gave no explanation for this strange behaviour and I never dared to ask him what he had been doing. My own theory is that he was somehow empowering the building.

If this sounds rather fanciful I should say that I had previously seen him empower and consecrate one of the other buildings in the ashram. When Bhagavan attended the opening ceremony of the office, he sat in Chinnaśwami's seat and unexpectedly remained there for about fifteen minutes. While he was sitting there he withdrew into the Self in the same way that he often did during *pārāyana* [the chanting of scriptural works]. Those of us who were present could all feel the power of his silence. Many of us came to the conclusion that he did this to empower the *sarvādhikārī* and the office in general to act on his behalf and manage the ashram in his name. Of course, this is only speculation. Bhagavan himself never gave any explanation for his behaviour on that day.

When all the work on the dining room had been completed there was a big opening ceremony. Everyone, including Bhagavan, attended. During the ceremony Chinnaśwami produced a big garland and tried to put it around the neck of Raghavendra Rao, the retired engineer who had been helping me.

He refused to accept it, saying, 'I am just an assistant. Annamalai Swami was in charge. He worked very hard to finish the building. Put the garland on him.'

Chinnaswami didn't want to acknowledge publicly my role, although privately he had told me that I had done a good job. After a few moments of hesitation he put the garland on a photo of Bhagavan and sat down.

At some point during this period, I can't remember exactly when, Bhagavan asked me to construct some steps on the ashram side of Pali Teertham so that devotees could easily walk down to the water. He took me to the tank, showed me where he wanted the steps, and indicated how wide they should be.

*Pali Teertham is a large tank, about fifty yards square, which adjoins the western side of the ashram. It is fed by stream water from the mountain. When full, the water is about fifteen feet deep.*

At that time there were no steps at all. Devotees who wanted to reach the water had to walk over a series of boulders which were embedded in the eastern side of the tank. My first job was to remove all these boulders. It was too late in the day to hire any workers so I started on the job myself. I tried to move a few but they were much too heavy for me. After making a few unsuccessful attempts I went and asked Ramaswami Pillai if he would lend me some of his workers. In those days he was looking after the ashram garden with about seven or eight other people. Ramaswami Pillai wasn't interested in my problem. He told me that he couldn't spare any of his workers because they were all engaged in important work. I went back to Bhagavan, told him that I couldn't move the rocks by myself, and added that Ramaswami Pillai had refused to lend me any of his workers.

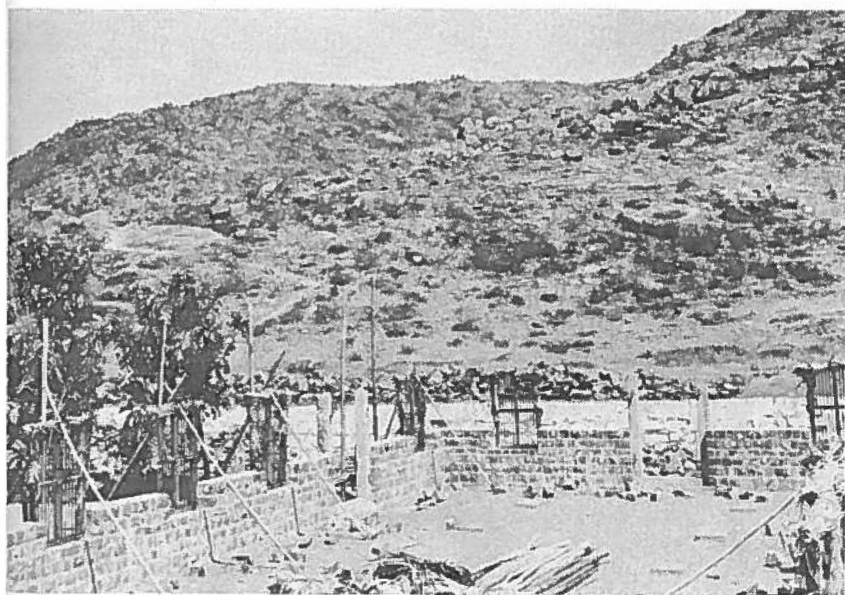
Bhagavan listened to my problems and then, rather surprisingly, said, 'Since you cannot find anyone else to do the work, I will come and help you myself'.

Bhagavan walked to the tank and pointed out a large protruding rock. 'We can start with that one,' he said.

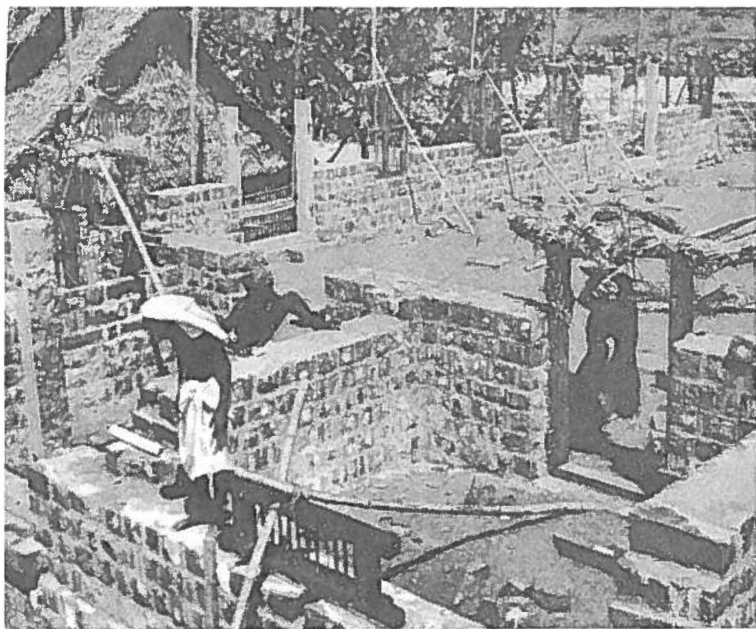
As we were both straining to lift it, Bhagavan's towel slipped from his shoulders and fell into the mud. It soon became clear that this rock was too big for us. We managed to lift one side of it a few



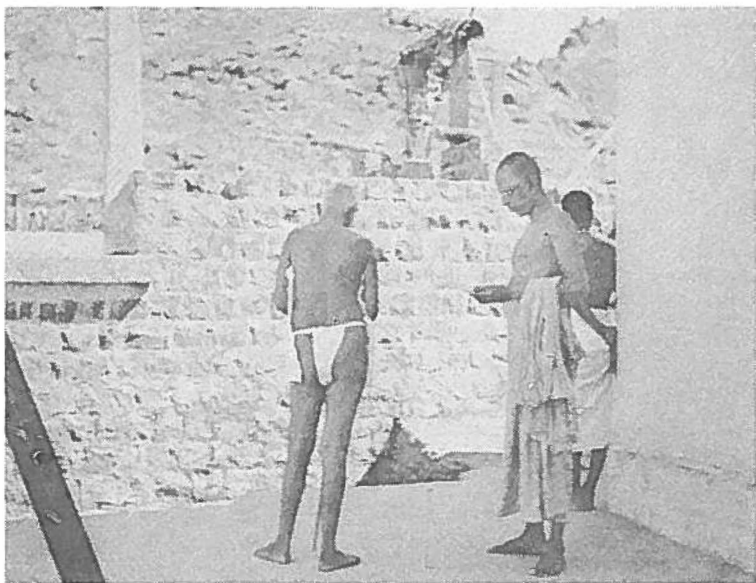
Site of the new dining room and kitchen: the rubble in the foreground came from the buildings which were demolished to make way for it. The building on the extreme left is Bhagavan's bathroom and behind it is the office and bookstore.



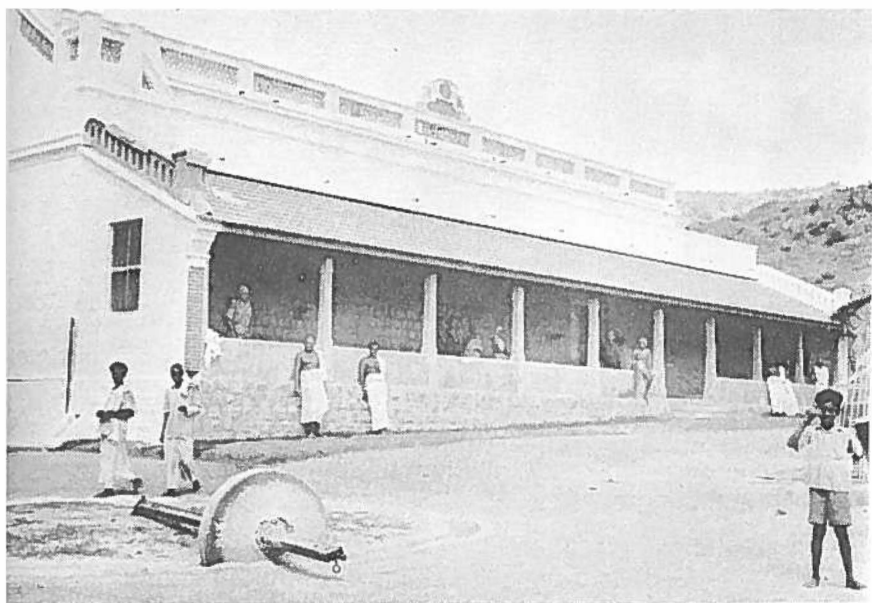
Work begins on the dining room. The path to Skandashram can be seen on the left and the white wall in the background is the revetment built by Annamalai Swami around 1929.



Annamalai Swami, a towel wrapped round his head,  
at work on the dining room.



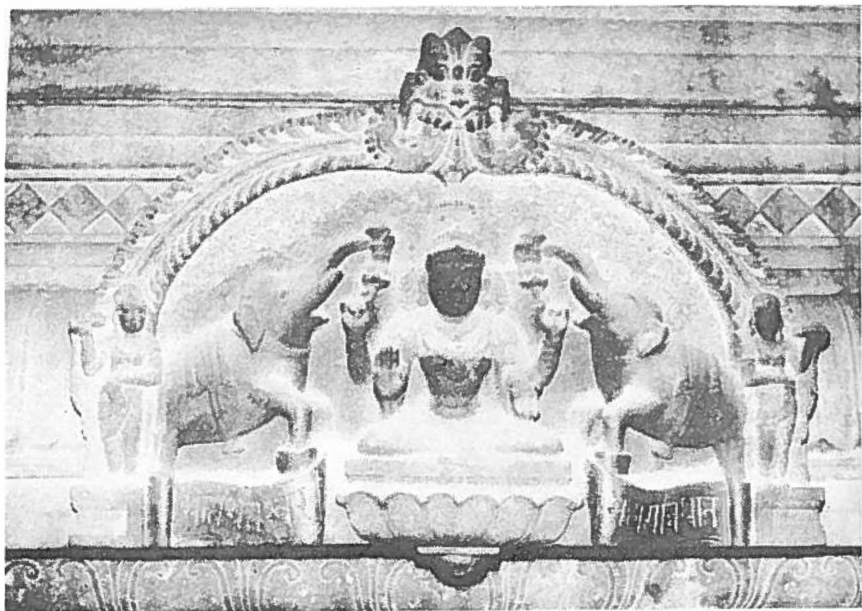
Bhagavan and Chinnaswami inspecting the work.



The completed dining room with Bhagavan sitting by the entrance.  
The name-and-date plaque which Annamalai Swami  
made is on the skyline.



The Mother's Temple, viewed across a very full Pali Teertham.  
The steps on the right leading down to the water  
were constructed by Annamalai Swami.



Above: The Sanskrit letters stencilled by Annamalai Swami over the entrance to the *garbhagriha* of the Mother's Temple.



Left: Bhagavan, seated on a tigerskin, relaxing in his bathroom. A copper water-heater and its chimney are in the background.

inches but we were unable to dislodge it from the slope. Bhagavan told me to release the rock, saying that it was too heavy for us to move. As it fell to the ground it trapped Bhagavan's towel firmly in the mud. Bhagavan then, surprisingly, abandoned both the work and his towel and returned to the hall.

I decided that Chinnaswami was the only person left who might be able to help me.

I went up to him and said, 'Do you know where Bhagavan's towel is? It is stuck in the mud under a rock in Pali Teertham.'

I took him to the tank, showed him the towel, and gave him a brief summary of what had happened there that day.

Chinnaswami was shocked to hear that Bhagavan had been obliged to work as a coolie because I couldn't find anyone else in the ashram to help me. He went to Ramaswami Pillai and asked him to send all his garden workers to the tank. Ramaswami Pillai initially objected.

'They are garden workers. Why should I send them all to lift rocks in the tank? Who will look after the garden if they all work there?'

Chinnaswami overruled him and sent all his garden workers to the tank to work for me. In retrospect I think that Bhagavan's brief attempt to help me was just a ploy to get me extra workers. He ordered me to release that first rock, knowing full well that it would trap his towel. He also knew from past experience how Chinnaswami would react to such news.

I often found it difficult to do the odd jobs that Bhagavan gave me. Two or three times I had to tell him that it was not physically possible for me to do a particular job all by myself. On each occasion Bhagavan offered to assist me. The other devotees didn't like to see Bhagavan doing manual labour so they persuaded Chinnaswami to give me a permanent worker to assist me with all the small jobs that needed to be done. This all happened later. At the time I built the Pali Teertham steps I still had to do all the small jobs by myself.

Ramaswami Pillai was very annoyed by Chinnaswami's intervention. He thought to himself, 'Both Bhagavan and Chinnaswami are on Annamalai Swami's side. I have no more work to do in this place. I will go back to my village and live there.'

He left the ashram but soon regretted his decision. Within a month he wrote a cryptic note to Chinnaswami: 'I was trying to sell needles in the streets of blacksmiths. When they are all making needles on that street, who wants to purchase them?'

He didn't say directly that he wanted to return but we all surmised that that was the reason for the note. Chinnaswami showed the note to Bhagavan and asked what he should do. Bhagavan told him not to reply to it. About a month later, when Ramaswami Pillai came back of his own accord, Chinnaswami happily gave him his old job back.

Bhagavan had instructed me to make two stairways: one in the middle of the east bank with wide steps and another nearer the ashram buildings with slightly narrower steps. After working for many days I managed to complete all the wide steps and all the narrow ones except for about four or five. This was the situation at the end of a normal working day in the middle of summer. Suddenly, I felt a great urge to complete the work that day. Since I knew I couldn't do it alone I offered the workers some extra money to stay behind and help me. They all agreed to stay until the work had been completed. Bhagavan seemed to approve of my plan. He asked Krishnaswami, the attendant in the hall, to rig up some electric lights so that we could see what we were doing.

'Annamalai Swami has suddenly developed an intense determination to finish the work tonight. Go and help him by putting up some lights.'

The work went quite smoothly and we managed to finish the last step by about 11 p.m. About an hour later there was a torrential summer storm which was so heavy it filled up the tank in less than an hour. Before the storm the tank had been almost empty. The stream behind the ashram then went from nothing to five feet wide and two feet deep in a matter of minutes. The water level in the tank did not go down for several weeks. If we had not stayed to finish the steps that evening, the completion of the work would have been indefinitely delayed. Was it Bhagavan who implanted this determination to work late in me? I cannot say, but it wouldn't surprise me if it were true.

It was not unusual for me to work at night. So far as Bhagavan was concerned I was on duty twenty-four hours a day. I often had to get out of bed in the middle of the night to supervise the unloading of large granite stones which I had ordered from Adinannamalai. Moving these stones, some of which were ten or twelve feet long, was strenuous work. The cart drivers didn't like to do this work in the heat of the day. Instead, they would show up between midnight and 2 a.m. When the deliveries arrived Bhaga-

van would come to my room and wake me up. I always kept a hurricane lamp in my room in case we received a surprise delivery of stones during the night.

Bhagavan would usually come and say, 'Take your hurricane lamp and show these people where to put the stones. Also give them a crowbar so that they can move the stones easily.'

Ordering these stones was one of my more pleasant jobs. The village of Adi-annamalai is located on the *giri pradakshina* road about 3½ miles from the ashram. Whenever we needed new stones I would leave the ashram at about 6 a.m. and walk to the village. I would take a small packet containing iddies, bananas and rice, because transacting the business often took several hours. Before I left I would always go and tell Bhagavan that I was planning to go. I think that Bhagavan would have liked to do this particular job himself.

Several times he told me, 'If I were given food like this, I would joyfully do this job'.

The walk to the village took about an hour and a half. After that it took most of the morning to give the details of the orders to all the stonecutters. When the work was over I would go to the Adi-annamalai temple, because it had good drinking water, and eat my lunch there. At about 1 p.m. I would return to the ashram by completing the *giri pradakshina*.

Despite my busy schedule Bhagavan once insisted that I should memorise the ten verses from *Sivānanda Lahari* which he himself had selected.

On another occasion he told me, 'If you want *mōksha*, copy this book [*Ellām Ondrē*] into your notebook. Then study it and live according to its precepts.'

I told Bhagavan, 'You are keeping me very busy. I have no time for copying. If someone else writes it down I will happily read it and study it.'

*Ellām Ondrē* [All Is One] is a 19th century Tamil advaitic text. The only known English translation I have managed to locate was published privately in 1950 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to commemorate Bhagavan's 71st birthday.

Bhagavan refused to accept my excuse. 'You have time to write your *mekkedu* [the daily list which showed how much Chinna-swami should pay to each worker]. Are you trying to get *mōksha*

by paying a price for it? I asked you to write it yourself because if you do it this way it will get impressed on your mind. If you write it once it is the equivalent of reading it ten times. Write a little every day. There is no hurry. Even if it takes a month you should do it yourself.'

From that day on I put aside a little time each day to do the copying. Bhagavan himself assisted me by writing down the headings for each chapter on the contents page of my notebook. He also completed the copying by writing the last line himself. When the copying was over he went through the notebook and corrected all my mistakes. Although I could read fairly well I had never taken the trouble to learn to write properly.

On another occasion, while he was giving me some building plans, he wrote out a verse from the *Tirukkural* and gave it to me: 'The state of oneness in which one is established in the Self is greater than a big mountain.'

I still have that verse. It is now pasted under a photo of Bhagavan in my room.

Bhagavan frequently told me that I should be aware of the Self while I was working.

He repeatedly told me, 'Don't forget your real nature. It is not necessary that you should sit and meditate. You should meditate all the time, even while you are working.'

In the beginning, when I first came to Bhagavan, I had asked him for a mantra. In response he told me to repeat 'Siva Siva' continuously. Later, Bhagavan advised me to keep my attention in the Heart while I was working. I had read that Bhagavan had spoken of a place called the Heart-centre which he located on the right side of the chest. I had assumed that Bhagavan wanted me to concentrate on this particular centre. However, when I started to practise in this way, Bhagavan stopped me and corrected me.

'This right-side Heart-centre is not the true Heart,' he said. 'The real Heart is not located anywhere. It is all-pervasive.'

'Stop meditating on the Heart-centre,' he continued. 'Find the source. That is the true Heart. Just as electricity comes not from the individual meter boxes in people's houses but from a single source, so too the whole world has a single source, which is the Self or the Heart. Seek and enquire into this source of limitless energy. If the centre of the Self were really located in the body, the Self would die when the body dies.'

I understood from these remarks that just as one cannot experience the nature and source of electricity by staring at the meter box in one's house, similarly, one cannot gain a direct experience of the current of the Self by concentrating on the Heart-centre. I gave up concentrating on this centre and tried to follow Bhagavan's advice.

In order to keep my attention on the Self while I was working I adopted, with Bhagavan's permission, the traditional approaches of '*nēti-nēti*' [not this, not this] and affirmation: 'I am not the body and the mind; I am the Self; I am everything.'

While speaking of spiritual matters I must mention that I once received a kind of *hasta dikshā* [initiation by touch] from Bhagavan, although Bhagavan himself would undoubtedly deny that this was his intention.

It happened in the old dining room. There was a tap there which was the main source of water for the ashram. Devotees used to fill their buckets there and some of them even used to bathe nearby. Because the constant flow of water made the ground around the tap very muddy, Bhagavan asked me to make a brick and cement platform around the tap. I did the work while Bhagavan sat nearby in a chair. At one point I stood up and accidentally banged my head on the tap. A large bruise appeared almost immediately. Bhagavan asked Madhava Swami to bring some *jambak* [pain balm] for me. When it arrived Bhagavan anointed my head with it and then massaged the affected part with both hands for about fifteen minutes. Meanwhile, I was carrying on with the work.

I was thinking, 'Bhagavan always says that I am not the body. Why should I make a fuss over a little thing like this?'

Then another thought occurred to me: 'Trouble came but this trouble has been a blessing. It is only because of this accident that I have got the good fortune of getting both of Bhagavan's hands on my head. Although I was not at first aware of it, Bhagavan is now blessing me with *hasta dikshā*.'

Bhagavan always refused to give any formal kind of *hasta dikshā* even though several people begged him to do so. Chadwick was one of the people who wanted to be initiated in this way. Sometime in the 1930s he tried to get Bhagavan into his room so that he could ask him for *hasta dikshā*. In those days, at about 1 p.m. every day, Bhagavan used to walk to Palakottu along the

We were all a little surprised that this distinguished-looking foreigner was willing to share a room with a complete stranger, particularly since he knew that he could have it to himself if he wanted to. However, since there were no objections to this arrangement, Chadwick moved into my room and stayed there for about 1½ years.

*In A Sadhu's Reminiscences, Chadwick's own account of the years he spent with Bhagavan, he wrote that he only shared the room for three months. When I mentioned this to Annamalai Swami he said that Chadwick had probably forgotten the dates. Annamalai Swami says that he remembers sharing the room for well over a year.*

Although we couldn't say much to each other at first—I later learned a few English words and Chadwick learned a little Tamil—we soon became close friends. We frequently walked around the hill together, usually taking the forest path rather than the outer road. On these occasions I used to regale him with stories from *Yōga Vāsishtha* and *Kaivalya Navanītam* while we were walking.

*Kaivalya Navanītam is a Tamil advaita text, mostly philosophical in character. Yōga Vāsishtha is another advaita work, attributed to Valmiki, in which the sage Vasishtha answers questions put by Rama.*

Of course, I couldn't convey more than the vaguest outline since I only knew about fifty words of English. Chadwick didn't mind listening to these strange pigeon-English narrations because they gave him an opportunity to talk to Bhagavan later.

Whenever we returned from our walk he would tell Bhagavan, 'Annamalai Swami has been trying to tell me a story from *Yōga Vāsishtha* but I only managed to understand a little of it.'

Bhagavan would then ask me which incident I had been narrating. I would tell Bhagavan the name of the story and he would then give Chadwick a full account of it in English.

During one of our *pradakshinas* the strap on one of Chadwick's sandals broke. This was a great disaster for him because he was unable to walk on the forest path without footwear. He sat down and started to call 'Arunachala! Arunachala!' in a loud voice. A few seconds later we heard an answering call: 'Ōm Arunachala!'

The caller, a local shepherd, appeared from behind a rock and asked us why we had been calling. I explained that Chadwick had just broken his sandals, and I showed him the broken strap. The shepherd came to our rescue by repairing it with two nails which he prised from his own sandals. A few minutes later he left us, saying that he had some goats to look after. Chadwick narrated this incident to Bhagavan when we returned to the ashram.

After telling him the story he concluded by saying, 'I called on Arunachala, and Arunachala came to help me'.

Bhagavan agreed with him: 'Yes, Arunachala Himself came to help you.'

In the period that we stayed together Chadwick insisted on showing me an embarrassing amount of respect. On one occasion he even prostrated to me and made his servant take a photo of the scene. He also took many photos of me supervising the construction work. I don't know what eventually happened to these pictures because Chinnaswami made Chadwick hand them all over to him.

*I went through all of Sri Ramanasramam's photographic archives, thinking that I could illustrate this book with some of these photos. Unfortunately, none of them seems to have survived. The pictures in this book have mostly come from other sources within the archives.*

After 1½ years Chadwick decided that he wanted a room of his own. Chinnaswami gave him permission to build inside the ashram, a privilege that was rarely granted in those days. Bhagavan obviously approved of the idea because he helped me to supervise the construction of the new room. He also attended the *grihapravēsam* [opening ceremony], presiding over it in a large wooden chair which Chadwick had thoughtfully provided for him.

A short time after the room was completed, Chadwick decided to visit Japan for a month. He had apparently had a desire to go there for many years. While he was away Bhagavan asked me to construct a gutter around Chadwick's roof because he had noticed that rainwater flowed between the front wall and the thatched roof of the veranda. He told me how to do the work and then later came to inspect it to ensure that it had been done properly. Chadwick's Malayali servant had been given permission to return to Kerala for the month that Chadwick was in Japan. When Chadwick wrote, notifying us of the date of his return, Bhagavan

path which ran by the banyan trees which are now behind the dispensary. Chadwick asked Rangaswami, who was Bhagavan's attendant at the time, to bring him back to the ashram via his room. He had already made a special path so that Bhagavan could easily walk to his room on his way back to the ashram. Bhagavan must have known what was going on because on the day that Rangaswami tried to divert him, he refused to come back even by his usual route. Instead, he took a long detour and finally returned via a path on the hill. Chadwick took the hint and dropped his plan.

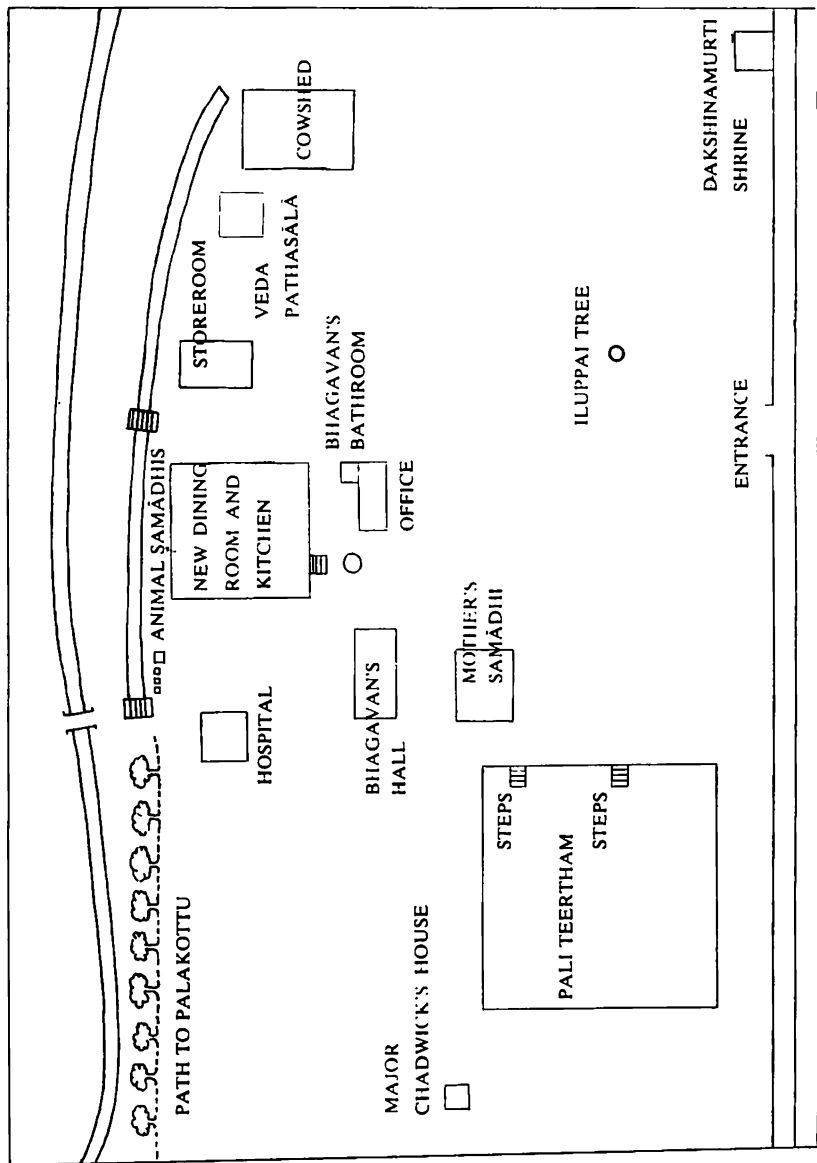
I had met Major Chadwick on the first day that he came to Sri Ramanasramam. In fact, I was the first ashramite he met when he walked in through the gate in 1935. I was standing under the big iluppai tree that is still standing near the main entrance. Chadwick walked up to me, decided that I must be Ramana Maharshi, and prostrated at my feet.

I tried to tell him, 'I am not Ramana Maharshi. Ramana Maharshi is inside. If you want his *darshan*, I will show you where he is.'

All this was conveyed in gestures as well as words because neither of us could understand the other's language. To make things clearer I took him to the hall to indicate to him who the real Bhagavan was. When the introductions were over, Chadwick and Bhagavan talked for several hours in English. This was quite unusual. Bhagavan rarely spoke at length in English, even though he was fairly fluent in the language.

It soon became clear that Chadwick was planning a lengthy stay at the ashram. This caused a minor problem because we had no suitable accommodation for him. Since I had one of the biggest rooms in the ashram Chinnaswami eventually decided that I should vacate it in favour of Chadwick. This was no problem for me because I could easily move into one of the ashram's coconut-leaf huts. Chadwick was not offered one of these huts because we all agreed that they would be far too primitive for a foreigner to live in. Chadwick was shown to my room while I was still packing up my things. When he discovered that I was being evicted in order to provide accommodation for him, he refused to accept the room.

'I like this man very much,' he said. 'He should not be thrown out of the room because of me. If you make him go, I will also go and live somewhere else. This is a big room. We can share it.'



instructed the office to inform this servant so that he could make the necessary arrangements to come back in time. I mention these small, trivial incidents only because they illustrate the care and concern that Bhagavan always showed towards his true devotees.

After Chadwick had been in the ashram for a few months a devotee called Seshayer complained to Bhagavan that Chadwick was receiving parcels of meat through the post. It was an absurd charge to make but since the ashram management did not permit any meat to be consumed on the premises, Bhagavan sent for me and asked if it were true. Because I shared a room with Chadwick, and because I watched him eat every day, I was able to assure Bhagavan that the charge was completely unfounded.

Bhagavan closed the matter by quoting a verse from Appar:

If a person is so bad that he eats cow flesh, still, if he becomes a devotee of Lord Siva, who has the Ganges in His hair, even though he is committing such a bad act, he is my God and I must prostrate to him.

*Before I continue with Annamalai Swami's narrative I would like to give an account of how I collected and assembled the material for this book. I interviewed Annamalai Swami over a period of six weeks in 1987. Though he displayed a remarkable memory for minor details which had happened 50–60 years before, he did not remember in which order the stories took place, or on what date particular events happened. In order to establish a reasonable and reliable chronology I cross-referenced his stories with published accounts by other devotees, and I went through old Ramanasramam account books in order to find out when particular projects were in progress. I also consulted all the old photos of the ashram to find out in which order the buildings were constructed. Wherever possible I attempted to corroborate the stories by talking to devotees, such as Ramaswami Pillai and Kunju Swami, who lived and worked in the ashram in the 1920s and 30s. As a result of this research I can say that though the stories come from Annamalai Swami's memory and the entries he made in his diary, the overall structure of the book and the order in which the stories have been narrated are wholly my own. For final verification Annamalai Swami himself twice went through my manuscript and, after making a few minor corrections, satisfied himself that his stories had been accurately retold.*

*On one or two occasions I was able to convince Annamalai Swami that the dates I had dug up during my research were more reliable than his own memories. For example, until I proved to him that Seshadri Swami (a man whom he met on his way to Ramanasramam) died in January 1929, he was quite convinced that he had first come to Bhagavan in 1930. There was one set of stories, though, connected with the construction of the Mother's Temple, on which we never came to an agreement. Annamalai Swami left the ashram (the circumstances will be described later in this chapter) in 1938 and went to live in Palakottu in order to devote himself more fully to meditation. All the evidence I have uncovered indicates that work on the Mother's Temple began in 1939. A ceremony to inaugurate the work took place in September of that year and a dated plaque commemorating this ceremony can still be found on the outside of the temple's southern wall. However, even though I showed all the relevant records to Annamalai Swami, he still believes that the work he did on this temple took place before he left the ashram in the middle of 1938. In deference to his wishes I have therefore included his temple stories in this chapter. Personally, I feel that they belong to the early and mid 1940s, a period when Annamalai Swami was again supervising construction work in the ashram.*

My last major job for the ashram was supervising some of the work on the *garbhagriha* [inner shrine] of the Mother's Temple. The chief *sthapati* [temple architect] was in overall charge. I merely supervised some of the workers and decided how much they should be paid each day. Chinnaśwami had been wanting to construct a large temple over the physical remains of his mother for many years. Bhagavan had approved of the idea of a temple but the construction was delayed until most of the other large buildings in the ashram had been finished. Sometime in the late 1930s Chinnaśwami asked me to find out what Bhagavan's views on the temple really were.

'Bhagavan always tells his plans directly to you,' he said. 'Please ask him what we should do about the Mother's Temple. Whether we should build it simply or on a large scale.'

I conveyed this message to Bhagavan. His reply was, 'If it is constructed well, and on a large scale, I shall be happy'.

Chinnaśwami, who had been in doubt about Bhagavan's

intentions for years, was overjoyed to hear the news. He immediately started to make preparations for the construction.

Since it was not ordinary masonry work an expert outsider had to be brought in. The whole project was entrusted to an expert in temple architecture and engineering. He brought with him many expert stone masons who had had a lot of experience in temple construction. Because all the workers were paid on a daily basis, I was asked to supervise some of them to ensure that the ashram got value for money. Although I knew nothing about temple construction, I had had enough experience of supervising workers to see that the stone masons were deliberately working very slowly. Since they were classified as skilled workers they were getting a very high daily wage for doing very little. It seemed to me that they were deliberately taking about three days to do one day's work. I told them that they were cheating the ashram, and I tried to persuade them to work more honestly but they refused to change their ways.

One of them told me, 'All you people here are eating and sleeping for nothing. Why are you troubling us about work? It is no loss to you if we work slowly.'

After a few unsuccessful attempts to get them to work I reported the matter to Bhagavan.

'The temple workers are working very slowly. In the evening Chinnaaswami pays them whatever I have written on the wages list. I don't like to waste the ashram's money on dishonest workers but I have no authority to dismiss them. Every day I write on the *mekkedu* that they should receive a full day's pay. But they are taking three days to do one day's work. If I write that they must be paid for work which they have not done, am I not also cheating the ashram?'

'Don't worry about this matter,' replied Bhagavan. 'If they cheat like this and get money which they have not earned out of the ashram, this money will not stay with them. Ultimately they will find that their only possessions are their hammers and chisels. The wages which they have received dishonestly will go to waste. They cannot cheat Bhagavan, they can only cheat themselves. They cannot exploit Bhagavan.'

He paused for a while before adding, 'They are exploiting and taking the money of the ashram. That money will not stay with them. We should not worry about the financial aspect of the work because God will supply all the money that we need.'

As usual, Bhagavan's faith was justified. The temple put a severe strain on the ashram's finances but we always managed to keep the work going. On some days the ashram had to depend on donations received during the day to pay the wages in the evening. At the start of the day we would hire workers even though we knew we had no money to pay them. During the day donations would arrive in various ways and by evening there would always be enough to pay the workers' wages.

I finally decided that my conscience would not allow me to supervise the temple workers any more.

'I don't want to do this work any more,' I told Chinnaswami. 'Every time I write out the wages list I feel that I am cheating the ashram.'

Chinnaswami accepted my resignation and asked the chief *sthapati* to take over the whole work. I went back to supervising the other ashram projects that were still in progress.

It is well known that Bhagavan never accepted money, but once, during the construction of the Mother's Temple, I did see him handle some for a few minutes. One of the *sthapatis* who had worked very well was dismissed merely because the head *sthapati* had taken a strong personal dislike to him.

This man came to Bhagavan, placed all his severance pay in Bhagavan's hands, and told him, 'I was working very sincerely but this man has asked me to leave. May Bhagavan please bless me.'

Bhagavan silently blessed him by gazing at him for about ten minutes. At the end of this period Bhagavan returned the money to him.

When the walls of the *garbhagriha* [inner shrine] reached the ceiling Bhagavan asked me to paint the name of the temple on the front wall. If one looks over the entrance to the *garbhagraha* one can see two elephants carved out of stone. Under their feet is a carved stone scroll. The full name of the temple, *Mātrubhūtēśvar-ālayam*, [The Temple of God in the Form of the Mother], is carved in stone on this scroll. Bhagavan wrote this name for me in Sanskrit letters. His idea was that I should make a stencil and then paint the letters on the scroll. Later, one of the *sthapatis* would carve the name by chiselling out the area covered by my painted letters.

I sat in Bhagavan's presence in the hall, carefully cutting out

the name. I kept all my attention on the work because I knew that I would not be able to get away with even the smallest of mistakes. Bhagavan was watching me all the time I was working. At about 3 p.m. Bhagavan used to go out of the hall to urinate. At that time, on that day, he stood up and started to move towards the door. Everyone in the hall, except for me, stood up. I was in the middle of cutting out a letter and I didn't want to risk spoiling it by taking my scissors away from the paper.

I heard a man muttering behind me, 'Bhagavan has stood up but this man has no respect. He is still sitting on the floor. He hasn't even stopped working.'

Bhagavan must have also heard this man because he seemed to change his mind about going outside. Instead, he came and sat next to me on the floor. He put his hand on my shoulder and watched intently as I finished cutting out that letter. Then, without bothering to take his expected trip outside, he got up and sat on his couch again. After that there were no more complaints about my disrespect.

When the cutting was over I painted the letters on the scroll under the elephants' feet. As I was working there the chief *sthapati* tried to stop me. He was not very fond of me because I had already spoken to him about the laziness of his workers.

He called up to me, 'Stop doing that! I am the only man who is competent to write letters like that! How can you do these things properly?'

Bhagavan came to my rescue yet again. He had been standing nearby watching me paint the letters.

He silenced the *sthapati* by saying, 'He did not do it on his own authority. I myself told him to do it.'

The *sthapati*, knowing that he could not overrule Bhagavan, permitted me to finish the work.

When the building work was nearing completion an expert sculptor was commissioned to make a Yogambika statue out of five different metals for the temple. It was to be made by the 'lost wax' method. In this technique a statue is first made out of wax and then completely covered with clay except for one small hole. Once the clay has dried it is baked to make it hard. The heat causes all the wax to drain out through the small hole, leaving a baked-clay mould for the molten metal to be poured into.

The pouring of the molten metals had to be done at an

auspicious time. The astrologers who were consulted selected a particular day and said that the casting should be completed between 8 p.m. and 11.30 p.m. that day. The mould was made in advance since it was not necessary to fabricate it at an auspicious time.

The sculptor started his fire at 8 p.m. on the appointed day on a site between the ashram dispensary and the banyan trees. He worked very hard for several hours but he was unable to get the metals to melt in the crucible. I am not an expert in these matters but even I could see that the fire was very, very hot. The sculptor frequently had to douse his clothes with cold water to counteract the heat, and he always dealt with the fire from a distance via a pair of very long tongs.

Bhagavan had gone to sleep at his usual time but when 11.30 came and went with no sign of the metals melting I felt justified in waking him up. I went to the hall, explained the situation to him and asked what we should do. Bhagavan made no reply. Instead, he got up and came to see for himself how the work was progressing. He sat on a stool about ten feet from the crucible and looked intently at the fire. Within one or two minutes, and without any further efforts from the sculptor, the metals all began to melt.

Bhagavan watched as the liquid was poured into the mould through the hole in its foot. When he was satisfied that the work had been properly executed he returned to the hall and went back to sleep. The next day, when the sculptor broke the mould and examined the statue, he very proudly announced that the statue was flawless.

At some point in the 1930s, when I had already completed many ashram buildings, I received an unexpected visit from my father. I took him to the hall to introduce him to Bhagavan.

On the way there I told him, 'Because you gave birth to me I have brought you to Bhagavan. Please take whatever blessings you need from him.'

My father was clearly pleased that I had become an ardent devotee of Bhagavan.

'When you were young,' he said, 'I didn't want you to become a *sādhu*. But now I am happy that I have given birth to such a son. Like Markandeya's father, I am happy that I have produced such a *tapasvin* [performer of *tapas*].'

*Before Markandeya's birth, Markandeya's father did tapas for*

many years in order to get a son. Siva eventually appeared to him and asked him the following question.

‘Do you desire to have a virtuous son who will live to be only sixteen, or do you want a dull-witted, evil-minded son who will survive to an old age?’ Markandeya’s father elected to have a short-lived, pious son.

When I took him to Bhagavan, Bhagavan started to tell him about all my work in the ashram.

‘All these big buildings were constructed by your son!’

I immediately denied the claim. ‘No! No!’ I told Bhagavan. ‘They were all constructed by your grace. It is all part of your *līlā* [divine play]. How could I have done any of this by myself?’

Then my father made a surprising statement. ‘Wherever you go, that place will be prosperous. I have seen this in your horoscope. There was a peculiar conjunction that indicated that temples and buildings would appear wherever you lived. That is why I tried to keep you at home. I wanted these buildings to be in our village. I knew that if you became a *sannyāsin* you would go and live somewhere else. I tried to prevent you from becoming a *sannyāsin* by keeping you out of school. My idea was: “If he never learns to read, he will never read the scriptures and never have any interest in God.” My plan failed because it was your destiny to come here. I have no regrets. I am happy that things have turned out the way they did.’

My father stayed for about a month and during that time we did *giri pradakshina* almost every day. At the end of his visit I took him to the station to see him off. While we were waiting for the train he started to cry. Through his tears he asked me if he would ever see me again in this birth. I had a strong inner feeling that the answer was ‘no’.

However, in order to console him, I said, ‘I don’t think that we shall meet again in this birth. But perhaps you will take another birth and come to me. In that birth we may both love each other. God can make all the arrangements for this.’

My feeling turned out to be correct. I never saw my father again.

Sometime later my mother also came and stayed for a month. I introduced her to Bhagavan and also did *giri pradakshina* with her almost every day. At the end of the month she announced that she

wanted to stay in the ashram and look after me in the same way that Bhagavan's mother had looked after him at Skandashram. Because I felt strongly that this was not her destiny, I asked her to go and talk to Bhagavan about the matter. Bhagavan wouldn't give her permission to stay. In fact he wouldn't even discuss the matter with her.

When she asked him whether she should go or stay, Bhagavan said, '*Pō! Pō! Pō! Pō!*' [Go! Go! Go! Go!] and dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

A few years later I received a letter saying that my father was dead.

After showing it to Bhagavan I said, 'Please bless him because he gave birth to me. Without this birth how could I have come to your presence?'

Bhagavan nodded and said, 'Yes'. When my mother died I made the same request and got the same answer.

My days as an ashram worker were coming to a close, although I didn't realise it at the time. In retrospect I can remember only one small incident which indicated that Bhagavan knew that my time in the ashram was coming to an end.

I was doing some digging with a crowbar when Bhagavan came and asked me, 'Did you decide to do this work yourself or did Chinnaswami ask you to do it?'

I told him that Chinnaswami had asked me to do it. Bhagavan was not very pleased.

'So, he has given you work. So, he has given you work. Why is he giving you work like this?'

A little later Yogi Ramaiah remarked to Bhagavan, 'Annamalai Swami is working very hard. His body has become very weak. You should give him some rest.'

Bhagavan agreed with him. 'Yes, we have to give him some rest. We have to give freedom to him.'

A few days later I went to Bhagavan's bathroom to help him with his morning bath. Madhava Swami and I gave him the usual oil bath and massage.

When the bath was over Madhava Swami asked a question: 'Bhagavan, the people who take *ganjā lēhiyam* [an ayurvedic preparation whose principal ingredient is cannabis] experience some kind of *ānanda* [bliss]. What is the nature of this *ānanda*? Is it the same *ānanda* that the scriptures speak of?'

'Eating this *ganjā* is a very bad habit,' replied Bhagavan. Then, laughing loudly, he came over to me, hugged me and called out, 'Ānanda! Ānanda! This is how these *ganjā*-taking people behave!'

It was not a brief hug. Madhava Swami told me later that he held me tightly for about two minutes. After the first few seconds I completely lost awareness of my body and the world. Initially, there was a feeling of happiness and bliss, but this soon gave way to a state in which there were no feelings and no experiences. I did not lose consciousness, I just ceased to be aware of anything that was going on around me. I remained in this state for about fifteen minutes. When I recovered my usual world-consciousness I was standing alone in the bathroom. Madhava Swami and Bhagavan had long since departed for breakfast. I had not seen them open the door and leave, nor had I heard the breakfast bell.

This experience completely changed my life. As soon as I recovered normal consciousness I knew that my working life at Sri Ramanasramam had come to an end. I knew that henceforth I would be living outside the ashram and spending most of my time in meditation. There was a rule that only those who worked for the ashram could live there full-time. Those who wanted to spend their time in meditation had to live somewhere else. I thus knew that I would have to leave the ashram and fend for myself, but the thought of losing my regular meals and my room never troubled me.

I made a belated appearance in the dining room to eat my last breakfast. As soon as I had finished eating I went up onto the hill to look for Bhagavan. I found him sitting on a big rock.

'I have decided to leave the ashram,' I said. 'I want to go to Palakottu to live alone and meditate.'

*Palakottu is an area of land immediately to the west of the ashram. Several of Bhagavan's devotees who didn't want to stay full-time in the ashram lived and meditated there.*

'Ah! Very good! Very good! Very good!' exclaimed Bhagavan.

The decision clearly had his approval. How could it be otherwise since it was Bhagavan himself who gave me the experience which precipitated the decision?

After getting Bhagavan's permission I packed my possessions and locked my room. I also locked all the other places that were in my charge.

I took the bunch of keys to Chinna Swami and told him, 'I have

decided to go and live in Palakottu. Please take these keys and keep them.'

Chinnaswami was, quite naturally, very surprised. 'Why are you leaving?' he asked. 'You have constructed all these buildings. You have done so much here. How can you go after doing all this work? Where will you sleep? How will you eat? You will have many troubles because you have no way of supporting yourself. Don't go, stay here.'

I told him that I would not change my mind. I also tried to give him the keys but he refused to accept them. I didn't want another argument with him so I just handed over the keys to Subramaniam, who was also in the office, and left.

It was an abrupt change in my life. Within a few hours of having the experience I was walking to Palakottu, knowing full well that I had left all of my old working life behind me.

## Palakottu

When I asked Bhagavan for permission to move to Palakottu I had no idea where I would live or how I would support myself while I was there. These, I thought, were minor matters that would sort themselves out in due course. Since Bhagavan had clearly approved of my decision, I was confident that he would continue to look after me. My faith in him was soon justified. As I was walking towards Palakottu I met Munagala Venkataramiah, the compiler of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

‘I have just left the ashram,’ I told him. ‘I am on my way to Palakottu to look for somewhere to stay. From now on I have decided to spend my time in meditation.’

Munagala Venkataramiah was astonished to hear the news, but at the same time he was very happy because he wanted someone to look after his hut.

‘Earlier today,’ he said, ‘I received a telegram from Bombay telling me to come at once. I am now on my way to the station. Take the keys to my hut and stay there till I get back. You will not have to buy anything. The room already contains everything that you will possibly need. I shall probably be back in a month or so.’

After giving me the keys he hurried off to the station. He didn’t even have time to show me the room.

It only took a few minutes to move my meagre possessions into the hut. There was still the problem of food to be solved—I had no money and no prospect of getting any—but my mind refused to pay any attention to the problem. In my euphoric state I just assumed that Bhagavan would take care of everything. Again my faith was justified. A few hours later Major Chadwick’s servant appeared with a stove, some cooking pots and enough provisions to cook me a meal. He explained his presence by saying that Chadwick had told him to come and prepare my midday meal for me. I was not unduly surprised that Chadwick had decided to help me. He and I had been friends for several years. What did surprise me, though, were the circumstances which surrounded the offer. Chadwick had been sitting with Bhagavan in the old hall earlier that morning trying to meditate. He had not been having much success because every time he closed his eyes a picture of my face

appeared in his mind. After making several unsuccessful attempts to get rid of it, he gave up trying to meditate and left the hall. As he was walking back to his room—he told me all this later that day—he was worrying about his inability to meditate. He came to the conclusion that it was not good to have close friendships with other devotees because such relationships disturb the mind.

When he reached his room his servant told him, ‘Annamalai Swami left the ashram this morning and went to live in Palakottu’.

Chadwick was as surprised as everyone else to hear the news, but his surprise soon gave way to a sense of relief. He decided that the strong images of me that he had been seeing a few minutes before were not, as he had previously supposed, unwanted disturbances to his meditation. Instead, they were a message from Bhagavan that he should send me some kind of assistance.

He turned to his servant and gave him some instructions: ‘Annamalai Swami is a good devotee who has served Bhagavan for many years. I somehow feel obliged to look after him. Take some food to his hut and prepare a meal for him. It is now 10 a.m. When the ashram lunch bell rings at 11:30 I want Annamalai Swami to sit down and eat a good meal. I don’t want him to be inconvenienced in any way just because he has left the ashram.’

Chadwick himself came along later to see how I was getting on.

‘For several years I have watched you carry out Bhagavan’s building plans,’ he said. ‘Now that the ashram is no longer supporting you I will take care of all your needs. I will make sure that it will not be necessary for you to go anywhere in search of food.’

To back up his words he immediately supplied me with a stove, cooking utensils, and enough food to last for many days. In the weeks that followed he checked my food supplies every time he visited me. He never asked if I needed anything, he would always look for himself. If he thought that I was running out of any particular item of food, he would instruct his servant to buy new supplies and bring them to me.

This was a very convenient arrangement because Bhagavan himself had instructed me, shortly after I moved to Palakottu, ‘Don’t ask anyone for anything. You should live on whatever God decides to send you, so long as it is sattvic food. Keep aloof from the things that are going on around you. Stay in your own hut as much as possible and don’t waste your time visiting other people.’

Bhagavan had once told me a strange story about a group of householder-devotees who lived in ancient times. These people lived with their families in a town but they had very little contact with them. Each morning they would cook and eat some food, go to a nearby forest, and spend most of the day sleeping under the trees. At around sunset they would return to their houses in the town. From sunset till dawn they would sing *bhajans* [devotional songs] and do other spiritual practices. Because they had enough money to live without working, they were able to repeat this cycle every day. These householders never mixed with worldly people. Instead, they lived in a completely detached way, spending all their time thinking about and worshipping God.

Bhagavan never encouraged extremes of behaviour but when he spoke to me about these people it was obvious that he approved of their lifestyle. I think that he was trying to make me understand that association with worldly people is a hindrance to one's *sādhana*. When I moved to Palakottu in 1938 I tried to follow his advice by living a detached and reclusive life.

I stayed in Munagala's hut for about two months. When he returned from Bombay I found another empty hut a few yards away which had recently been vacated by Tambiram, Mudaliar Patti's son. He was very happy to give me the room because I had given him a little help while he was constructing it.

'All the articles a *sādhū* might need are inside,' he said. 'Take the key and use the room while I am away.'

He refused to reclaim his room when he came back a few months later.

'I offered you this room,' he said. 'Why should I now claim it back? There are plenty of huts here. I will go and live somewhere else.'

In those days I was quite friendly with Vaikunta Vas, a man who became one of Bhagavan's attendants in the 1940s. He lived in Pondicherry at that time but he often came to visit me with a large group of devotees. Whenever he came they would all sleep in my hut. On one of their visits it rained quite heavily. There was no room to cook inside because there were so many people, and the rain made it impossible to cook outside. Vaikunta Vas eventually had to send some of his people to town to buy food for us.

While they were away he said to me, 'This place is very small. We cause you a lot of trouble when we come here. If you erect

some kind of shed or veranda we can all stay there on future visits without disturbing you. Don't worry about the costs, we can pay for everything.'

All the devotees donated whatever they could afford. I also contributed Rs. 50 since I thought that it was a good idea. I sent word to a man called Arumugam, a mason who had helped me a lot during my working days, and asked him to assist me in erecting the hut. He came immediately. While Arumugam and I were looking at the site, deciding what should be done, Bhagavan spotted us and came to see what we were doing. He had been walking in a leisurely fashion in the channel that runs along the back side of Palakottu. When he spotted us, he abruptly changed direction and came over to meet us.

'Are you planning to build a house for Swami?' Bhagavan asked Arumugam.

That hadn't been part of our plan but Arumugam suddenly found himself saying, 'Yes, I will construct one'.

'What materials are you going to use?' asked Bhagavan. 'Mud or brick? Tiles or terrace?'

'I think I will build the walls of brick,' said Arumugam, 'and put a terrace roof on top of them.'

I was very surprised to hear this. Before Bhagavan arrived we had been discussing nothing more grandiose than a coconut-leaf shelter. Now, in front of Bhagavan, Arumugam was committing himself (and possible me) to building an expensive house.

Bhagavan seemed to approve of the plan.

'Let us see gradually how it happens,' he said. Then, having concluded his business with us, he walked away.

I asked Arumugam why he had made all these expensive promises when he knew I was only planning to build a small hut.

'I don't know,' replied Arumugam. 'The words automatically came to me when Bhagavan asked the questions. But now I have given my word to Bhagavan I am obliged to keep it. Bhagavan made me say these words so Bhagavan must want this building to be built. Don't worry about the money. Even if I have to sell my own house to pay for yours, I will do it.'

The building programme soon got off to an auspicious start. Within a day of Arumugam making his promise I received an unexpected donation of Rs. 100. Arumugam bought 4,000 bricks with the money and placed them in a prominent position in front

of Kunju Swami's hut as a signal to Bhagavan that he was serious about fulfilling his promise.

Arumugam never had to sell his house. As was the case with all Bhagavan's building projects, the money just appeared whenever it was necessary. The initial donations from Vaikunta Vas and his friends from Pondicherry enabled us to start work immediately. We began by digging large foundation trenches about six feet deep. It was difficult work because the ground was full of rocks. In order to complete the trenches we had to dig out about 200 big granite stones.

When Bhagavan saw these stones on one of his daily walks to Palakottu, he laughed and remarked, 'You have found buried treasure'.

They didn't look very valuable to me; they just looked like ordinary rocks.

Bhagavan continued: 'Even if you had found buried treasure, what would you do with it? You would have to sell the treasure to buy stones for your foundations. Now look what has happened here. God has not only provided you with free stones, he has also delivered them.'

Bhagavan treated my house as if it were an ashram building. He came every day to watch the construction, he gave us advice, and he often asked us about our future plans. When Arumugam saw how much interest Bhagavan was taking he got more and more enthusiastic about the work. Because he felt that Bhagavan had made him start the work, he always had the idea that he was executing Bhagavan's plans, rather than his own.

We ran out of money when the walls reached the top of the windows. Since there was no money and no work to do I decided to dismantle the scaffolding. I had no idea when we would be able to start building again. Bhagavan must have noticed me doing this while he was on one of his walks to Palakottu. When I went to the hall later that day Bhagavan immediately asked me why I had been taking away the scaffolding. I told him that we had no more money.

Bhagavan turned to Krishnaswami, his attendant, and said, rather pointedly, 'Annamalai Swami has no money. He says he has no money.'

As I heard Bhagavan speak in this peculiar manner (Krishnaswami had already heard what I said) I knew that our money

problem would somehow be solved. If Bhagavan ever took a special interest in a devotee's problems, as he did on this occasion, some divine force would automatically bring about a solution. Bhagavan himself did nothing. He never claimed that he was going to solve a problem, nor did he ever accept responsibility for the remarkable events or coincidences which brought devotees' problems to a satisfactory conclusion. He merely knew from long experience that if a devotee brought a problem to him, that problem would often be solved through some mysterious and spontaneous manifestation of the Self.

The next day I received a donation of Rs. 200 from Ramaswami Mudaliar, a devotee who had been quite friendly with me when I had been working for the ashram. He lived in Acharakkamm, a village between Madras and Tiruvannamalai. When he heard that I was constructing a house for myself, he sent me the money and then later came in person to help me with the work. Vaikunta Vas also visited me and volunteered to help. Since the work was already half done, the three of us managed to complete it in less than a month.

We were ready to start work on the roof when Bhagavan came and offered a suggestion: 'It will be good if you use palmyra timber for the beams. That was the wood which was used in our house in Tiruchuzhi [the town where Bhagavan was born and the place where he lived until he was about twelve years of age].'

We took the hint. A few days later Ramaswami Mudaliar went to a nearby village and purchased some palmyra trees.

I informed Bhagavan that I had followed his advice and purchased some palmyra trees. He then began to question me about the dimensions of the beams.

'What will be the breadth of the bottom of the beam?' he asked.

I cannot remember exactly what I told him but when I gave him the answer he said '*Beish!*' which means 'Very good!'

'What about the thickness?' enquired Bhagavan.

I told him that I was planning to make them five inches thick. Bhagavan looked a little concerned.

'Will that be strong enough?' he asked.

When I assured him that it would he smiled and said, 'Then what more do you need?'

I reproduce this conversation merely to illustrate the concern that Bhagavan showed at all stages of the construction.

A few weeks later he asked if I had remembered to install a grinding stone. When I answered 'Yes' he said, 'What more do you need? What more do you need? What more do you need?' I took comments like these to be blessings on my house.

The house was completed without any further problems. I had no desire to have a big opening ceremony. I just went to the hall and told Bhagavan, 'I am planning to enter my house for the first time today. Please bless me.'

Bhagavan, of course, never overtly blessed people. In this case he just nodded his head to indicate that I could go ahead with my plan. Instead of having a formal *grihapravēsam* [opening ceremony] I gave an informal *bhikshā* [feast] to the monkeys in Palakottu. I spread two litres of pongal [rice and dhal cooked together] on the rocks near the tank, allowed the monkeys to come and help themselves, and then moved into my new house. This was my last change of address. I have now lived in this room for more than fifty years.

Bhagavan clearly wanted me to stay in this place, rather than any other. While I was still living in Tambiram's hut, well before the new room had been thought of, Arumugam had offered to buy me a two-acre plot on the *pradakshina* road, about one kilometre from Sri Ramanasramam. Arumugam not only promised to buy the land, he also promised to build me a house there. I told Bhagavan about this offer as he was walking through Palakottu. Bhagavan clearly disapproved. He turned his head to one side, without giving me any reply, and abruptly started walking away from me.

There was another occasion, also before my room was built, when I tried to live somewhere else. Feeling a desire to meditate in a cave on the mountain, I found one and made it habitable. I still slept in my hut. I just went to the cave during the day. I would wake up at 4 a.m., prepare food for the day and take it to the cave. I did this for about a week. It wasn't a great success because my meditation was frequently disturbed by visitors. A group of men and women used to come three times a day, sit outside the cave, and talk in a very vulgar way. They even tried to beg food from me. They couldn't understand that I wanted to be left alone to meditate. I wanted solitude for my *tapas* but these people wanted to entertain themselves by disturbing me. Finally, I went to Bhagavan and told him what had happened. After describing all

the various disturbances I had experienced I explained how I had come to find myself in this situation.

‘I have this desire to live in a place where nobody visits. I feel another desire to get food without any effort. I also want to meditate constantly with my eyes closed, without seeing the world at all. These desires often come to me. Are they good or bad?’

‘If you have desires such as these,’ said Bhagavan, ‘you will have to take another birth to fulfil them. What does it matter where you stay? Keep your mind always in the Self. There is no solitary place apart from the Self. Wherever the mind is, that place is always crowded.

‘It is not necessary to close the eyes when you meditate. It will be sufficient if you merely close the mind’s eye. There is no world outside you which is not in the mind.

‘One who leads a righteous life will never make plans of this sort. Why? Because God has already decided what will happen to us even before sending us into this world.’

I should have anticipated this answer because it was contained in one of the verses from *Sivānanda Lahari* [verse twelve] which he had asked me to memorise many years before:

One may practise austerities in a cave, or in a house, or in the open air, or in a forest, or on top of a mountain, or standing in water, or surrounded by fire, but what is the use? O Sambhu [Siva]! Real yoga is the state in which one’s mind constantly abides at your feet. One who has realised this state is a true yogi. He alone enjoys bliss.

During the 1930s I had often noticed Paul Brunton, the author of *A Search in Secret India*, in the ashram. We became better acquainted after I moved to Palakottu, largely through a misunderstanding which I shall explain later. Brunton’s book, the first western publication to give an account of Bhagavan, brought a lot of new devotees to the ashram. In 1939, when I was living in Palakottu, Chinnaśwami tried to prevent him from entering the ashram.

He told him, ‘You should not come for Bhagavan’s *darshan* any more. You should not write about Bhagavan in future and you should not ask Bhagavan any questions.’

Chinnaśwami was annoyed with him because he hadn’t asked for permission to write about Bhagavan or given any profits from the book to the ashram.

Brunton appealed to Bhagavan: 'I am writing about you for the benefit of the world. Is it right to ban me in this way?'

Bhagavan, as was usual in such cases, backed up Chinnaśwami.

'If you ask Chinnaśwami,' he said, 'he will also say "I am doing good for the world". You are saying that you are doing good for the world. What can I say?'

Then Bhagavan kept quiet and refused to make any more comments on the subject. Chinnaśwami, encouraged by Bhagavan's refusal to intervene, told Brunton, 'I have told you to go. If you don't go away I shall bring the police.'

*Annamalai Swami was an eye-witness to these exchanges. Another interesting record of Brunton's expulsion can be found in the manuscript version of Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi. The following six entries about Paul Brunton's final visit were all deleted prior to publication:*

1) Talk 638, probably dated 2.3.39: 'Sri Bhagavan said to someone in the hall: "An American university has conferred a Ph.D. degree on Mr Brunton. So he is now Dr. Brunton. He will arrive here shortly."'

2) Dated 7.3.39: 'Dr Paul Brunton, Ph.D., arrived in Tiruvannamalai by the early morning train. He came to the ashram by 8:30 a.m. He looks well but says that he is not as well as he looks. There was an unusual calm in the āśramam premises. Why? There was much difference in the reception this time and the reception during his last visit. He was deified then; no one dares speak to him now. Each vied with another to serve him then; but no one is free to approach him now. He is only as good as ever.

'He left the hall at about 9.45 a.m.'

3) Dated 11.3.39: 'Dr Brunton brought two fine walking sticks and one lovely fountain pen as presents to Sri Bhagavan from others. They were all appreciated.'

4) Talk no. 649 ends with Bhagavan saying, '...the Self is not separate from Brahman.' Mungala Venkataramiah then wrote: 'This interesting conversation ended abruptly because there was a breeze between the sarvādhikārī and Dr Paul Brunton at this stage of the conversation.'

5) Dated 19.3.39: 'Dr Brunton left last night all of a sudden.'

6) Dated 21.3.39: 'Dr Brunton has written to Mr V. G. Sastry that he will not hereafter speak or write of the āśramam or of Sri

*Maharshi to anyone and that he will be content with seeing Sri Maharshi in his heart.*

*'Sri Bhagavan said that Dr Brunton was obliged to leave the place by the play of the higher power. He could not stop here a moment longer than was allowed by that power; nor can he stay away from here when drawn again by the same power.'*

*Brunton never visited the ashram again during Bhagavan's lifetime.*

Brunton left and went to stay with a devotee called Ganapati Sastri in town. This Sastri told Brunton, incorrectly, that I had also been thrown out of the ashram. Brunton, taking pity on someone he thought was a fellow victim of Chinnaswami's caprice, brought me a *dhōti* and a big bag of rice.

As he was giving them to me he said, 'I am very unhappy that you have left the ashram. I am willing to provide you with anything you might need. Just send me a chit if you need anything.'

I had already explained that I had left the ashram voluntarily but this in no way diminished his willingness to help.

Ganapati Sastri was also banned from the ashram because Chinnaswami heard that he had been helping Brunton. Ganapati Sastri, like Brunton before him, came to Bhagavan and complained about this decision.

'Chinnaswami has told me not to come to the ashram,' he said. 'Bhagavan is just sitting like a stone Vinayaka statue. I have served the ashram for a long time. I have also donated three *almīras* [cupboards] full of books to the ashram. Will Bhagavan not ask Chinnaswami why he is not allowing me to come to the ashram?'

On this occasion Bhagavan didn't even bother to give an answer.

Chinnaswami's bans were rarely permanent. An apology and a promise to comply with Chinnaswami's wishes in future were generally enough to gain readmittance to the ashram. Chinnaswami used expulsions or threats of expulsions to keep the ashram workers and devotees in line. Bhagavan generally backed him up because he disapproved if devotees got into arguments with the ashram management. Bhagavan's standard response to anyone who wanted to find fault with Chinnaswami, or the ashram management in general, was, 'Attend to what you came here for'.

Many devotees had good reason to complain about the treatment they received at Chinnaśwami's hands but Bhagavan always discouraged them from expressing their dissatisfaction.

*While Annamalai Swami's attendant was translating this account for the benefit of some Tamil-speaking visitors, Annamalai Swami interrupted the reading to make the following comments:*

*'You should not think that Chinnaśwami was a bad man. He was just doing his duty. Bhagavan could not have run the ashram himself because he had no mind and no inclination to do it. He needed someone else to take charge. Chinnaśwami was the ideal man because he was loyal, dependable and hard-working. Bhagavan put his power into Chinnaśwami, and that power enabled him to take charge of all the ashram's affairs. He was doing Bhagavan's work through Bhagavan's grace. He occasionally had to be dictatorial and ruthless because there were many people who were trying to interfere in the running of the ashram. There were even people who were trying to organise Bhagavan himself and tell him what to do. Although it may sound strange, in many ways Bhagavan and Chinnaśwami were like two sides of the same coin. Bhagavan was Siva, the still, silent centre of the ashram, whereas Chinnaśwami was śakti, the power which comes from Siva and organises all the activities around him.'*

*In all the talks I had with him I never felt that Annamalai Swami had any ill-will towards Chinnaśwami or anyone else. He always told his stories without rancour in a very factual way. If there was any emotion at all, it was a kind of wry amusement as he recollected the tumultuous events of his youth.*

*On several occasions he told me, 'I will tell you all my stories, but don't use them to start campaigns against anyone. Write them as factually as you can. It's not good to think badly of anyone. Just stick to the facts.'*

*I kept these guidelines in mind throughout the preparation of this book. After going through the final draft Annamalai Swami informed me that he was happy both with the way I had retold his stories and with the manner in which I had recreated so successfully the atmosphere of Sri Ramanasramam during the 1920s, 30s and 40s.*

After a few months in Palakottu I noticed that my mind was

beginning to get quieter and quieter. During my working days my mind had been constantly occupied with thoughts about building matters. The mind would continue its incessant activities even after the end of each day's work. Plans, problems, and theoretical solutions to problems, would continue to fill my mind long after the actual work was over. I found it very hard to meditate under such circumstances.

Bhagavan had told me, 'You are not the body, you are not the mind. You are the pure consciousness, the Self. You are all-pervasive. Be aware of this at all times, even while you are working.'

I tried very hard to put this *upadēsa* into practice while I was working, but I cannot say that I had much success.

When I moved to Palakottu I found it far easier to practise Bhagavan's teachings. My mind became much quieter and even my body began to change. While I had been working in Ramanasramam there had always been a lot of heat in my body. Working with lime made the body feel very hot and I compounded the problem by spending a large part of each day out in the sun. After a few months of meditation in Palakottu my mind became relatively quiet and still and a wonderful coolness pervaded my body. In the course of time, after many years of practice, both of these conditions became permanent.

Bhagavan often visited me when he took his daily walk in Palakottu. He once dropped in while I was cooking my food and asked me what I was preparing.

When I told him, 'Only rice and sambar,' he was very pleased. 'Very good!' he exclaimed. 'The simple life is the best.'

*Sambar is a spicy sauce which is served with most South Indian meals. A meal consisting only of rice and sambar would be considered to be very meagre fare by most South Indians. Usually, at least one vegetable dish would be added, along with buttermilk, rasam (a spicy liquid) and a hot pickle.*

On one of his other visits he told me that I should make a chutney out of a green leaf called tiruvakshi. He had told me several times before that the flowers and leaves of this plant were very good for the body. On one of his subsequent visits I offered him some of this chutney, primarily to show him that I was following his advice by preparing it regularly. He took a small amount but he discouraged me from offering it to him again.

‘This is for your benefit not mine,’ he said. ‘I have plenty of food in the ashram. I intended this advice to be applicable only to you.’

I managed to feed Bhagavan three times in my new house, twice with rice and once with this chutney.

One of the *sādhus* who lived in Palakottu saw Bhagavan eating in my house and jokingly remarked, ‘The food which Bhagavan took in the ashram was not enough. So he came to Annamalai Swami to take *mandapappadi*.’

*Arunachaleswara, the chief deity in the main temple in Tiruvannamalai, is occasionally taken around the giri pradakshina route. At regular intervals the procession stops so that devotees can offer food to the God. These food offerings are known as mandapappadi.*

I also occasionally gave Bhagavan fruit which grew wild in Palakottu. Once I gave him some wood apples and on another occasion some elandai fruits which grew outside my room. About a week after I had given them to Bhagavan I went to the hall to have *darshan*. After I had prostrated to Bhagavan he told me that the ashram had just received a parcel of very sweet elandai fruits from North India.

Bhagavan gave me one and jokingly remarked, ‘Last week you gave me a sour-tasting elandai. Today I am giving you a sweet-tasting one in return.’

Bhagavan gave me this *prasād* with his own hands while he was eating. This was very unusual: when he was sitting in the hall the *prasād* would always be distributed by the attendants and not by Bhagavan himself.

Although I was no longer permitted to eat in the ashram except on special occasions, Bhagavan sometimes still gave me food from the dining room. I was once walking through the back gate of the ashram at about 8 p.m. when I saw Bhagavan and Subramaniam standing near the dispensary. Bhagavan asked Subramaniam to get some food for me.

‘When Annamalai Swami was here,’ he said, ‘he used to enjoy eating aviyal [a curry made out of curd, coconut and vegetables]. Today a lot of aviyal has been prepared, far more than we need. Go to the kitchen and bring some on a plate. We can serve it to him here.’

Subramaniam brought the aviyal and Bhagavan himself served

it to me. Bhagavan stood next to me while I was eating, illuminating my meal with the light from his torch.

I tried to stop him by saying, 'The moonlight is enough for me,' but he paid no attention. He shone his torch on my plate until the last morsel had been consumed.

In the fourth year of my stay in Palakottu Bhagavan advised me to restrict my diet.

'Each day,' he said, 'you should eat only one coconut, a handful of peanuts, one mango and a small lump of jaggery [brown sugar]. If fresh mangoes are not available you can eat dried ones.'

Bhagavan told me that this diet would purify the body and help to keep the mind stabilised in the Self.

He also warned me, 'In the beginning you will get diarrhoea but don't worry, the problem will go away after a few days'.

At the same time he told me that I should keep *mauna* [silence] and spend as much time as possible in meditation. The instruction to keep *mauna* was very unusual: Bhagavan normally discouraged people from taking vows of silence by saying, 'It is more important to control your mind than your tongue. What is the point in remaining silent if you cannot keep the mind still?'

Within a few weeks of adopting this new regime I became so thin that my bones started to protrude.

People would ask me, 'Are you not eating? Are you hungry? Do you need some money?'

To avoid such comments I kept my whole body covered and only went to see Bhagavan at night. My body became so thin, I didn't even have the strength to lift a bucket of water. To hide my condition I locked myself in my room during the day. It wasn't too hard to avoid people. As soon as the devotees discovered I was in *mauna* they left me alone.

I spent most of my time meditating on the idea 'I am the Self; I am everything'. During meditation I often felt a kind of energy rise up to my head. I don't know whether it was *kundalini* or some other kind of energy. Whatever it was it came by itself. I never tried to make it come, nor did I try to control it in any way. This meditation, combined with the diet and the *mauna*, produced one other interesting side effect: my forehead became very shiny and apparently my facial expression became radiant and full of light. Several people noticed these things and made comments about them.

I lived like this for about a year. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, Bhagavan turned to me one day in the hall and said, 'You need not have these food restrictions any more. You can take normal food and you can also start talking again.'

I don't know why he singled me out for this special *sādhana*, nor do I know why he later cancelled his instructions. It was all very unusual. I cannot recall any other instance of Bhagavan telling a devotee to live like this.

During my early years in Palakottu I regularly came to see Bhagavan in the hall. I would usually come once in the morning and once in the evening. In 1942, after several years of living like this, Bhagavan called me out of retirement.

He came to my room and said, 'You are not showing your face much any more. Follow me.'

As we were entering the ashram through the back gate Bhagavan said, 'They are planning to build a small hospital. You should build a bigger hospital here.'

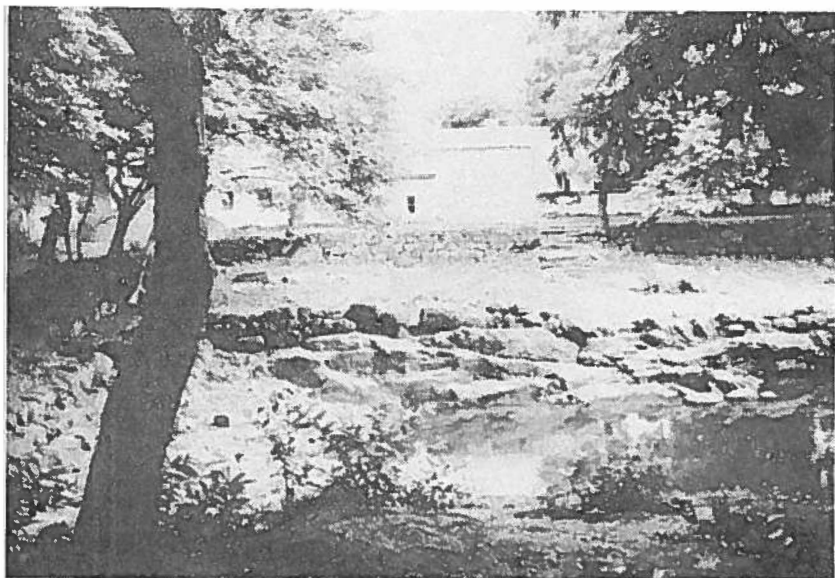
*Bhagavan himself called the building 'vaidyasālā', a word which is usually translated as 'hospital'. This term is something of a misnomer since the building only contains three fairly small rooms. Although Bhagavan's cancer operations were performed in this 'hospital', it usually only functions as a clinic and a dispensary for out-patients.*

He pointed to the site on which the hospital now stands and indicated with a gesture of his arm where the entrance should be. I have mentioned before that Bhagavan sometimes only gave me brief hints instead of proper plans. This was a classic example. Apart from indicating the site, his only initial instruction was a rather vague wave of the arm.

Before he left Bhagavan imparted an all-too-familiar restriction: 'Don't tell anyone that I have given you these instructions. Start the work and pretend that you are doing it on your own authority.'

When I heard these words I knew that my quiet, comfortable way of life was about to be shattered by another major battle with Chinnaswami.

There were two jackfruit trees and one mango tree on the site that Bhagavan had indicated. My first job was to cut them down. As I was studying the area, working out plans for the foundations,



The view across Palakottu tank, 1993. The white building in the centre is Annamalai Swami's residence.



Inside Annamalai Swami's ashram: the building in the background is the one which Bhagavan encouraged and helped Annamalai Swami to build. He has lived there for more than fifty years.



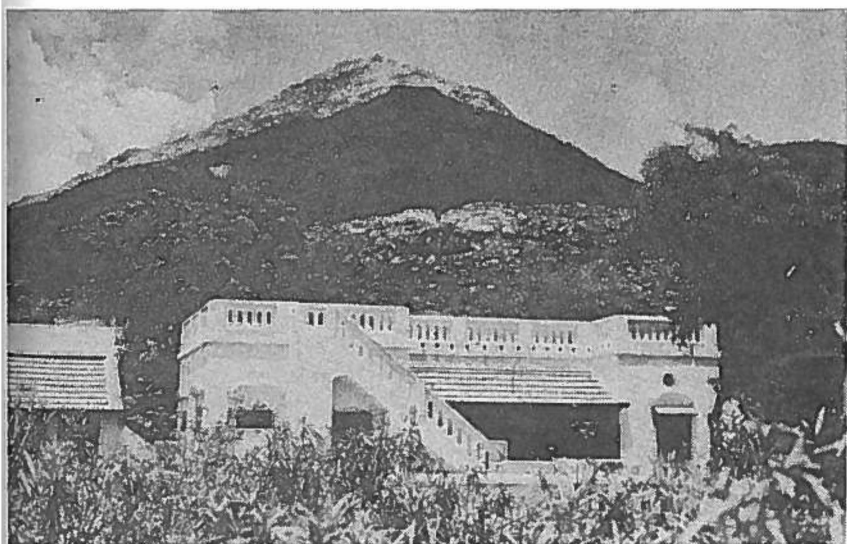
Extreme left: Chadwick's house.



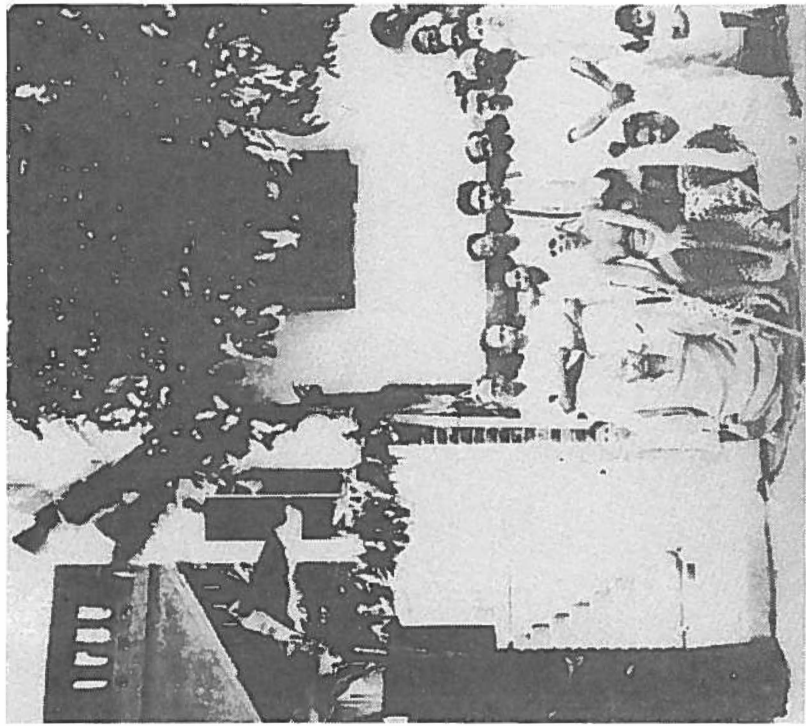
Major Chadwick.



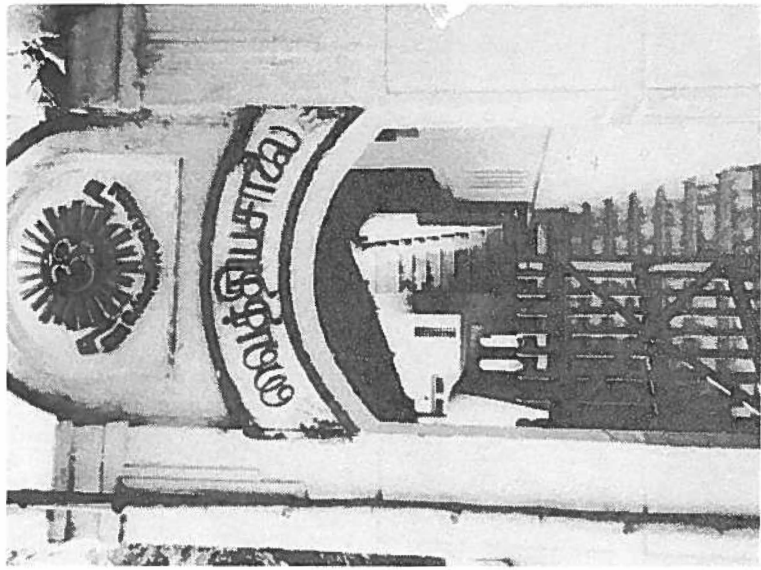
**Bhagavan taking his daily walk in Palakottu along with  
Madhava Swami and S.S. Cohen.**



**The completed hospital, with Arunachala in the background.**



Bhagavan at the opening ceremony of the hospital.  
Annamalai Swami is not in the photo.



The last job: The archway over the entrance to the hospital  
(not yet built in the photo on the left)  
with the name 'Vaidyasala' on it.

a man who had occasionally done odd jobs for me in Palakottu came to see what I was doing. Knowing that he was a reliable worker, I immediately engaged him to help me to cut down these trees. We managed to start the work without being interrupted or questioned because everyone in the ashram was having his after-lunch sleep. It was only after the trees had been cut down that Chinnaswami came along to see what was going on.

In answer to his predictable questions about what I was doing, I replied, as ingenuously as I could, 'I heard that you were going to build a small hospital. I thought that a bigger one was needed so I came along to construct it for you.'

It didn't occur to Chinnaswami that I would not begin a building like this unless Bhagavan had personally asked me to do so.

Chinnaswami shouted at me: 'You are not an ashram worker anymore! You left the ashram and went to Palakottu! Why have you come back to trouble us? What authority do you have to cut down our trees like this? The plans for the hospital have already been drawn up by a man in town. Why are you interfering?'

To back up his argument he sent Ramaswami Pillai to town to fetch the man who had drawn up the plans.

Chinnaswami's shouting and the noise of the trees being cut had attracted a crowd of about 20-30 people. Many of them wanted to know why I was cutting down these trees. If Chinnaswami had gone ahead and followed his own plan they could have remained where they were.

I explained again: 'I am going to construct a big hospital here. These trees had to be cut down to make room for it.'

I tried to make it sound as plausible as possible but everyone could see that there was a big hole in my argument: if no one had given me permission to cut these trees, I had no authority to do so.

When Chinnaswami finally came to the conclusion that I was acting on my own authority, and that I intended to carry on, he roared at me, 'How dare you disobey me like this? What authority do you have here? Do you know who I am?'

I replied, as calmly as I could, 'You do not know who you are and I do not know who I am. That is why we are fighting like this.'

The crowd of onlookers was siding with Chinnaswami, largely because I was unable to give any satisfactory explanation for my

behaviour. A few of the people joined in the quarrel on Chinna-swami's side.

'Why are you behaving like this? Go back to Palakottu! Why have you come back to the ashram? Why are you cutting our trees?'

The whole affair was turning into an ugly mob scene. I walked away and stood in a corner, pretending that I had accepted defeat. At that moment Bhagavan chose to make an appearance. I had noticed him watching us through the window of the hall. He was well aware of the quarrel that was going on not more than thirty yards from his window but he chose not to interfere until it was nearly over.

Bhagavan walked up to me, put his head next to mine and whispered, 'What are these people saying?'

I whispered back, 'They are saying, "What authority do you have to come here?" and, "Why are you cutting down these trees?"'

Bhagavan sighed and said, '*Avanga ishtam. Avanga ishtam. Avanga ishtam.* [‘Let their desire be done’ repeated three times.] You can go back to Palakottu.'

Shortly after I had departed a new devotee who had been attracted by the noise asked one of the crowd to tell him what had been going on.

The man he selected said, 'A man called Annamalai Swami, who used to work here, was planning to build a big hospital. We cannot afford a big hospital because we don't have enough money. We sent him away, partly because he had no authority to build here, and partly because we had no money to carry out his plan.'

'If you want a big hospital,' the new devotee said, 'I can give you all the money you need. Don't let finance be a consideration. If you want to construct a big hospital, following the plan of this Annamalai Swami, I will pay for everything.'

This was an unexpected bonus for the ashram. The old plan was dropped and Chinna-swami personally asked me to supervise the construction of the new one. Bhagavan's ways and methods are truly mysterious.

I didn't move back into the ashram. I ate my meals there while the work was in progress but I returned each night to Palakottu. In the beginning I continued to cook my own food but Bhagavan soon put a stop to that.

‘Why are you preparing food in Palakottu if you are working here for us? Come and take all your meals here. It will be more convenient for you.’

Bhagavan took a special interest in the hospital, perhaps more so than in any other building. He would come, even when there was nothing to supervise, and carefully inspect everything that had been done. When there was little or no work going on, and nothing of interest to inspect, he would still come to the site and sit there for long periods. On these occasions he would often look at me and give me the same type of *darshan*, involving a direct transmission of grace through the eyes, that he frequently gave to devotees in the hall.

The building was completed without any major incidents. As was the case with the dining room, the last job was putting the name over the entrance. Bhagavan again wrote the letters on paper and asked me to make a copy of them on the wall. I erected some scaffolding and sat down to do the work. As I was sitting there working Chinnaswami came and started to shake the poles of the scaffolding.

‘Any ordinary mason can do this job,’ he said. ‘There is some construction work going on in the Morvi Guest House. Go and supervise that work.’

*The Morvi Guest House is a building which was then being constructed on the other side of the road from the main ashram compound. It is now used to house visiting devotees.*

I declined to go since Bhagavan had instructed me to do this particular job.

‘Let it wait for some time,’ I said. ‘My destiny as an ashram worker and the destiny of the hospital are linked together. When I have finished this job I will go back to Palakottu and stay there.’

Bhagavan watched all this from a distance without interfering or making any comment. My prediction turned out to be true: writing the word ‘*Vaidyasālā*’ over the entrance to the hospital was the last construction work I ever did for the ashram.

*In the previous chapter I said that I thought that Annamalai Swami's supervision work on the Mother's Temple took place in the 1940s. I think that the temple work was done around this time, and that it ended before the hospital was completed. The hospital project*

*was started in 1942, but I have not been able to ascertain when it was finally completed. The archway with the word 'Vaidyasālā' on it may have been added by Annamalai Swami a long time after the main work was completed. In a photograph of the opening ceremony which now hangs in the ashram dining room, the arch is not there.*

During all the time I worked on the hospital I had to put up with Chinnaswami's barely concealed hostility. Sometimes he didn't even bother to hide it.

I was once walking past him on the way to the hall when he said in a very loud voice to the people who were near him: 'If one wants *punya* [spiritual merit] one should be like Annamalai Swami. Bhagavan is giving him many works to do. Because of this he is very intimate with Bhagavan. Chadwick is taking care of all his physical needs, so why should he care for people like us any more?'

It was the same story as before: he was irritated because he had no control over me. For me, the ashram at that time was an oppressive environment to work in. I was very happy to escape back to Palakottu once the work on the hospital was over.

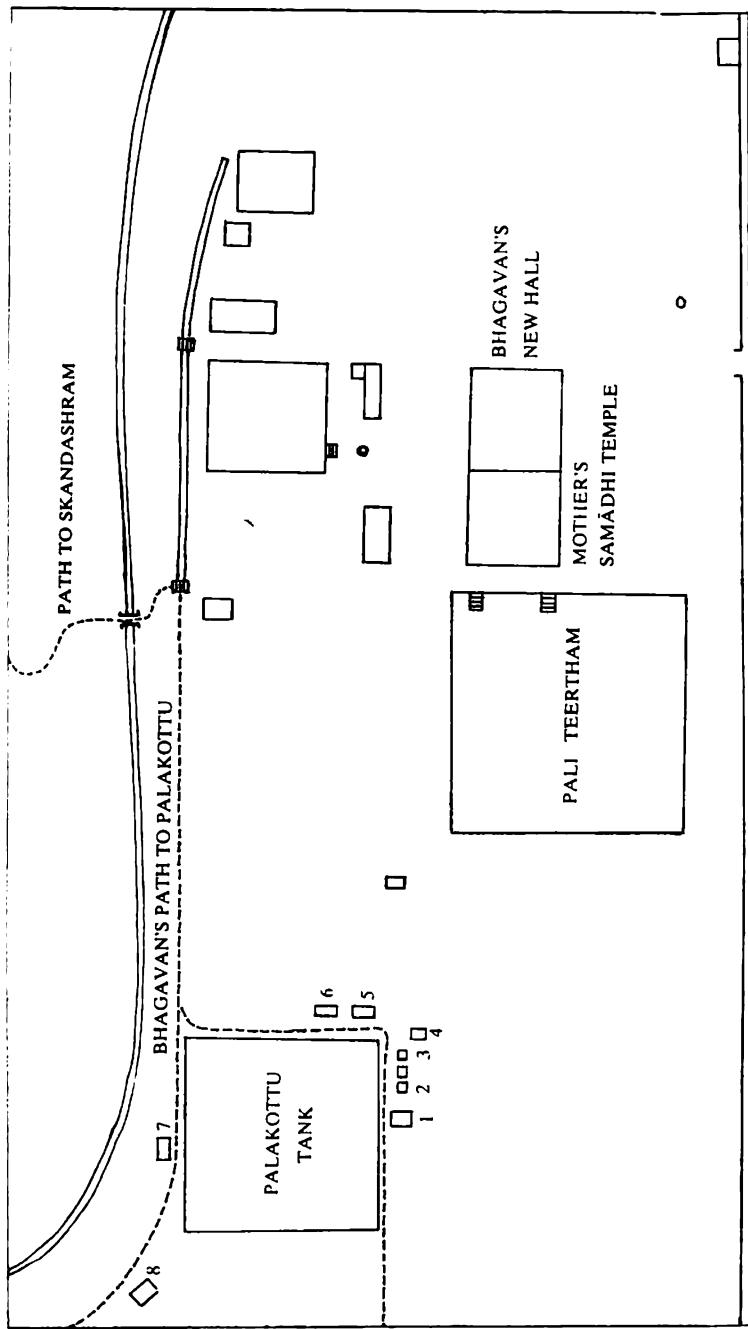
A few months after the hospital had been completed Bhagavan confirmed that my time as an ashram worker had come to an end.

I was sitting in the hall during the evening *darshan* when Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'You are an independent person. You are an independent person. You are an independent person. Your *karmas* [actions] are finished. From now on, nobody, whether he be a king, a *dēva*, an *asura* or a human being, will order you around and tell you what to do.'

*In Hindu mythology there are two spirit realms, one inhabited by dēvas, who are good spirits, and one by asuras, who are very violent and aggressive. The inhabitants of the two worlds are frequently at war with each other.*

I had a great feeling of strength and peace when Bhagavan said these words. I was also immensely relieved to know that I would not have to come back to the ashram to work again.

In the mid 1940s, when Bhagavan began to find it difficult to walk, Arumugam and I levelled and cleared the path on which Bhagavan usually took his daily walk. The path ran through the ashram to Palakottu and then back to the ashram via the lower



Sri Ramanasramam and Palakottu. The temple over the Mother's *samādhī* and Bhagavan's new hall were completed in 1949. After Bhagavan passed away in April 1950 he was buried midway between his old hall and the Mother's Temple. A large hall was erected over his *samādhī* in the 1960s. Many of the *sādhīs* mentioned in this book lived in Palakottu in huts or houses around the tank: 1. Annamalai Swami 2. Tambiram 3. Ramanatha Brahmachari 4. Yogi Ramaiah and Krishnaswami

5. Swami Satyananda and Munagala Venkataramiah 6. Kunju Swami 7. Paul Brunton 8. S.S. Cohen.

slopes of the hill. To make a smooth surface we put mud on the path and covered it with soft sand. We also installed a tall stone at a place where there was a break in the slope so that Bhagavan could hold on to it while he was climbing. The path needed occasional maintenance because the herds of goats which roamed around the lower slopes of the hill frequently kicked thorny twigs onto it. One day, as I was walking along this path, I noticed several new thorns. I took a branch from a nearby tree and swept the path clean.

That night, when I went to the ashram for *darshan*, Bhagavan asked me, 'Who cleared that path?'

I told him that I had decided to clean it because I had noticed some thorns while I was out for a walk.

Bhagavan then asked me rather sharply, 'Why are you reflecting on this act which you have done?'

I immediately understood that Bhagavan was trying to tell me that I should not have the idea, 'I have done this service for Bhagavan'. I was not aware that I was dwelling on this thought but Bhagavan must have seen it in my mind.

'You can see my mind. I was not aware that I was thinking, "I have done this". I just cleared the path because I didn't want Bhagavan to tread on any thorns.'

Bhagavan responded by saying, 'If you do not look back at the acts that you have done, a lot of benefits will accrue to you.'

Bhagavan still seemed to be suggesting that I was consciously dwelling on the act so I told him again, 'Bhagavan knows that I was not consciously thinking, "I did this job"'.

Then I quoted a verse by Tayumanavar: 'O God, you know my mind, you know my actions. If, in spite of this, you chase me away from you, I shall have many troubles.'

Bhagavan smiled at my quote and didn't pursue the matter any further.

Bhagavan warned me several times about the dangers of being attached to the I-am-the-doer idea. On one of these occasions he told me a story about King Vallalan, a Saivite king of Tiruvannamalai whose devotion to Siva is extolled in a Tamil work called *Arunāchala Purānam*. This king was responsible for building one of the large *gōpurams* [towers] in the main temple in Tiruvannamalai. After he had completed this *gōpuram* he had a strong feeling, 'I have built this great *gōpuram*'. On major festival days

Arunachaleswara, the temple deity, is taken out of the temple and paraded through town. According to one local legend, on one such ten-day festival, Arunachaleswara refused to pass through the passage under King Vallalan's new *gōpuram* because the king had too much pride in his achievement. For nine successive days Arunachaleswara chose a different route to leave the temple. On the tenth and last day the king realised his mistake and became more humble. He broke down and cried before the God and begged him to use this *gōpuram* for just one day. Arunachaleswara saw that the king's pride had abated and granted his request.

In the early 1940s I noticed that Bhagavan was finding it increasingly difficult to climb the steps at the bottom of the path to Skandashram. Because he often took this route when he went for his walks on the hill, I thought that it would be a good idea to make a metal handrail so that he could support himself while he ascended and descended. I mentioned my plan to Bhagavan, adding that I was willing to bear all the costs and do the work myself.

Bhagavan declined my offer. 'It's not necessary,' he said. Then he added, 'If you have any spare money, spend it on extra buildings in Palakottu.'

In the 1940s Bhagavan's deteriorating health worried everyone except Bhagavan himself. If people showed that they were concerned about his ill-health he would gently criticise them for mistakenly identifying him with the body. I saw an interesting example of this attitude when Bhagavan was on one of his daily walks to Palakottu. At that time Bhagavan had been having severe trouble with his digestive system. He had become very weak because he had only been able to eat small amounts of food. It was easy to tell how weak he was because his gait became stumbling and unsteady. As Bhagavan entered Palakottu a man called Jagadeesa Sastri, who was a devotee and a great vedantic scholar, approached him and told him how worried he was to see Bhagavan in such a feeble state.

Bhagavan listened for a while to these sympathetic remarks and then commented, 'The Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram has given you the title *Vēdānta Ratna Bhūshanam* [The Diamond Ornament of *Vēdānta*]. How can you, with all your vedantic knowledge, still take Bhagavan to be the body? Is this body Bhagavan?'

After I had been in Palakottu for about six years Chinnaswami put a lot of pressure on Chadwick to try to persuade him to stop supporting me. By that time Chadwick had stopped sending me food. He just used to give me Rs. 50 every month. This was as good as the old arrangement since it was more than sufficient to meet all my needs. Chinnaswami didn't approach Chadwick directly, he used a man called Narayana Iyer as an intermediary. This Narayana Iyer was instructed to give Chadwick the following message.

'You must stop supporting Annamalai Swami. It sets a bad example to the other devotees here. If all those devotees who now work in the ashram latch onto a rich devotee and leave, there will be nobody left in the ashram to serve Bhagavan or to look after the ashram.'

Chadwick at first ignored the order and carried on supporting me. But when Chinnaswami repeatedly sent him similar messages he knew that he had to make some kind of response. He found himself in something of a quandary: he wanted to carry on helping me but at the same time he didn't want to offend Chinnaswami. He knew, from long experience of living in the ashram, that Chinnaswami frequently expelled devotees who went against his wishes. Since Bhagavan never overruled Chinnaswami in these matters, he knew that he might be thrown out of the ashram if he carried on helping me. Chadwick decided, quite rightly, that Bhagavan was the only person who could properly advise him in this matter. As they were walking together on the hill Chadwick explained the situation to him.

'I have been supporting Annamalai Swami for many years. Chinnaswami is now sending me frequent messages which say that I must stop helping him. Should I carry on helping him or should I stop?'

Bhagavan replied, 'Who are you to help Annamalai Swami?'

Chadwick was reluctant to stop supporting me even after Bhagavan had hinted that he should. He carried on for a few more weeks until he finally realised that his primary obligation was to follow Bhagavan's instructions.

This was, quite naturally, a very worrying time for me. Because Chadwick had told me about Chinnaswami's orders I knew that my support might be cut off at any moment. If I had had more faith in Bhagavan, I would have known that Bhagavan would

never abandon me. As it was, my fears were only put to rest by a strange incident which happened on the hill. I was walking on the lower slopes of Arunachala, on a full-moon night, wondering what would happen if Chadwick stopped his support.

Suddenly a loud voice came from behind a rock: 'Child don't worry! Child don't worry! Child don't worry!'

I searched the area thoroughly but found no one within calling range. I finally had to conclude that it was Bhagavan himself who had been speaking to me. Although the voice was not his, the thrice-repeated phrase was very typical of him.

Some time during this period, before I received this assurance from Bhagavan, I decided to take the strain off Chadwick by begging for my food.

I thought, 'Instead of depending on anyone else, I will go for *bhikshā* [beg for my food] in town'.

Since this would bring about a major change in my lifestyle, I knew that I had to first get Bhagavan's permission. He had previously told me not to beg for anything but I thought that he might now give me permission in order to save Chadwick from further embarrassment. One evening, while I was sitting in the hall, I explained the situation to Bhagavan and sought his permission to go for *bhikshā*. Bhagavan remained silent for about fifteen minutes. At the end of that period I stood up to leave. I knew that Bhagavan's long silence indicated that he was not going to give me permission. Unexpectedly, Bhagavan told me to sit down again.

'You have sat for so long,' he said. 'Why are you standing now?'

I sat down again. A few minutes later Arumugam, the man who had helped me to build my room and to clear Bhagavan's path, came into the hall. I noticed that he had left a big bag of rice outside the door.

When I asked him, 'What is this rice for?' he replied, 'I brought it for you. I suddenly felt an urge to give you something.'

The timely appearance of Arumugam was Bhagavan's answer to my request: I should not ask anyone for anything. I should depend on what devotees voluntarily gave me.

Chinnaswami was very displeased when he heard that Arumugam was also supporting me. He told him that if he continued to supply me with food he would not be permitted to enter the

ashram. This was a very serious threat because, in addition to being a devotee, Arumugam earned most of his money by doing building jobs for the ashram. Arumugam was somewhat bewildered by this order.

‘What have I done wrong?’ he asked Bhagavan. ‘I was just helping Annamalai Swami. Is it right that I should be thrown out of the ashram merely for helping a fellow devotee?’

As I have mentioned before, Bhagavan never intervened when Chinnaswami dismissed workers or told devotees to leave the ashram.

He told Arumugam, ‘You should discuss this matter with Chinnaswami. It is not my business to interfere in these matters.’

Arumugam, like Chadwick before him, reluctantly bowed to Chinnaswami’s decrees.

The worries about money and the threats of expulsion were all part of Bhagavan’s *līlā* [divine drama]. He might send devotees tests and trials but he never abandons those who have faith in him. All this was brought home to me very clearly when Chadwick finally and reluctantly cut off his support. The very next day I received three rupees in what can only be called miraculous circumstances. One of Bhagavan’s devotees, a man called Adiveeraghavan Pillai, lived in a village called Telur, which is near Vandavasi [thirty miles north-east of Tiruvannamalai]. For some days he had been feeling an urge to send some money to one of the *sādhus* at Sri Ramanasramam. It was rather a vague urge for he had no particular person in mind. Then, one night, he had a dream in which he saw the words ‘Annamalai Swami, Palakottu’ written on a piece of paper. So, the next day, he sent this three rupees to me. He didn’t send it directly, he sent it in the name of Jayaram Mudaliar, a man who also lived in the village. I wrote a letter of thanks to this Mudaliar in which I mentioned that the money had come on the day after my only other source of income had stopped.

About a week later a group of devotees came from this village and announced that they wanted to look after all my needs. For many years afterwards they gave me enough money to support myself. Is this not a fine example of Bhagavan’s grace? When I first came to Bhagavan, Sri Ramanasramam looked after all my needs. On my first day in Palakottu Chadwick took over and looked after me for more than six years. The day after Chadwick

stopped his support Bhagavan sent these villagers to look after me. Bhagavan told me never to ask for anything. Since he would never have permitted me to starve, he must have known that I was destined to receive material support all my life.

My life with Bhagavan taught me the value of faith, obedience and surrender. When I obeyed Bhagavan's words, or had complete faith that he would look after all my spiritual and physical needs, everything went well. When I tried to mould my own destiny (such as the time I went to live in the cave and the time I ran away to Polur) things went badly. Life's lessons have thus taught me the value and the necessity of complete surrender. If one surrenders completely to Bhagavan; if one lives by his words, ignoring all others; if one has enough faith in Bhagavan to stop making plans about the future; if one can banish all doubts and worries by having faith in Bhagavan's omnipotence—then, and only then, Bhagavan will bend and mould one's circumstances, transforming them in such a way that one's spiritual and physical needs are always satisfied.

I have mentioned before that I used to go to see Bhagavan every evening. Usually, I would visit him between 9 and 10 p.m., listen to his teachings, and absorb what I could of his grace-filled silence. I had one little privilege during this time: Bhagavan would often ask me to take the thorns out of the soles of his feet. I was given this job by Bhagavan because he felt that I could do a better job than the regular attendants. Bhagavan's feet frequently picked up thorns because he never bothered to wear sandals.

While I was taking out these thorns Bhagavan would often ask in a concerned way, 'Is your eyesight good enough to find the thorns? Can you see what you are doing?'

Once he asked me, 'Are you taking out the new thorns or the old thorns?'

This was a difficult question to answer. Bhagavan would frequently have thorns in his feet for days or even weeks without ever being aware of them.

These nightly visits were a special time for me. Whenever I visited him Bhagavan would always talk to me with a lot of love and affection. Unfortunately, as I was soon to discover, this period of my life was drawing to a close.

A few days later, when I entered the hall, Bhagavan covered his head and face with a *dhōti* and refused to look at me. This was

very unusual. He normally greeted me with a few friendly words whenever I entered the hall. He behaved in exactly the same way on the two nights that followed.

On the third day I asked him, 'Why is Bhagavan covering his face like a Muslim woman every time I come into the hall? Does this mean that I should not come anymore?'

Bhagavan replied, rather cryptically, 'I am just behaving like Siva. Why are you talking to me?'

*The first sentence of Bhagavan's answer is a literal translation of a phrase which has the more general meaning, 'I am sitting here, just minding my own business'.*

I took this to be an indication that Bhagavan didn't want me to come to see him anymore. I walked out of the hall and stood under a tree. After some time Bhagavan called me back into the hall. I noticed that there was no one else there at the time.

'Are you an atheist who has no belief in God?' asked Bhagavan.

I was too puzzled to make a reply.

'If one has no faith in God,' Bhagavan eventually continued, 'one will commit a lot of sins and be miserable. But you, you are a mature devotee. When the mind has attained maturity, in that mature state, if one thinks that one is separate from God, one will fall into the same state as an atheist who has no belief in God.

'You are a mature *sādhaka* [spiritual seeker]. It is not necessary for you to come here any more. Stay in Palakottu and do your meditation there. Try to efface the notion that you are different from God.'

I left the ashram and never went back again. Although my room is only about 200 yards from the ashram gate, I have not visited the ashram once since that fateful day in the 1940s.

About twenty days later, as Bhagavan was walking in Palakottu, he came up to me, smiled and said, 'I have come for your *darshan*'. I was quite shocked to hear Bhagavan speak like this even though I knew he was joking.

When I asked him for an explanation he said, 'You have obeyed my words. You are living simply and humbly as I have taught. Is this not great?'

Though Bhagavan had asked me not to come to the ashram any more, I still thought that I had the freedom to talk to him when he

visited Palakottu. Bhagavan disabused me of this notion shortly afterwards when I went to see him while he was walking on the hill.

He turned to me and said, 'You are happier than I. What you had to give you have given. What I had to give I have given. Why are you still coming to me?'

These were his last words to me. I obeyed his instructions and never approached him again. I still had Bhagavan's *darshan* when he came on his daily walk to Palakottu but we never spoke to each other again. If we met accidentally he would walk past me, without acknowledging my presence.

Bhagavan had once told me: 'Do not cling to the form of the Guru, for this will perish; do not cling to his feet for his attendants will stop you. The true Bhagavan resides in your Heart as your own Self. This is who I truly am.'

By severing the personal link between us, Bhagavan was trying to make me aware of him as he really is. Bhagavan had frequently told me that I should not attach a name and form to the Self or regard it in any way as a personal being.

Once, as we were inspecting the figure of the goddess which had been decorated for the *Navarātri* festival [a ten-day festival which normally occurs in October] in the ashram, he warned me, 'Don't believe in the reality of this figure. Don't believe that God has any form. The Self is all-pervasive. Don't think that it is limited to the form of a body, even the body of a deity.'

Bhagavan gave me his grace and then severed the personal relationship between us. The bond of love and devotion was not separated; it was just restricted to the mind and the Heart.

When Bhagavan became very sick at the end of the 1940s I was sorely tempted to visit him. I never succumbed because I knew that Bhagavan had instructed me to stay away from his presence. Some people who were not aware of what Bhagavan had told me thought that I was being disrespectful by staying away. One devotee even asked Bhagavan about this.

'Annamalai Swami served Bhagavan for a long time,' he said, 'but he is not coming to see Bhagavan now that Bhagavan is seriously ill.'

Bhagavan, detecting a certain self-righteousness in the questioner, remarked, 'He is the one who is not causing any trouble'.

Then he added, 'You people are here but your minds are elsewhere. He is elsewhere but his mind is here.'

Rangaswami, Bhagavan's attendant, reported this to me later that day. It was good to hear that Bhagavan was consciously aware that I was constantly thinking and worrying about him.

During the last year of Bhagavan's life I suffered from a continuous, severe stomach pain. Some of the doctors who came to treat Bhagavan treated me as well but none of them was able to relieve the pain. I was unable to eat anything except gruel, and even that only in small quantities. If I tried to eat a lot of gruel, or any different kind of food, the pain in my stomach would become unbearable. In the last days of Bhagavan's life the pain got much worse.

It got so severe that I remember thinking, 'Let me give up this body before Bhagavan gives up his. I cannot stand this pain any longer.'

I finally decided to pray to Bhagavan, not for good health, but for death. At that time there were some steps going up to my flat roof. I climbed up them very slowly and painfully and looked in Bhagavan's direction.

'Please Bhagavan,' I prayed, 'let me attain *samādhi* before you attain *samādhi* [let me die before you die].' At that moment I saw the great light in the sky, the light that signified that Bhagavan had died. Many people saw this light and most of them reported that it resembled a meteor. It appeared to me in a different form: I saw a great column of light about twenty feet high and 1½ feet wide in the middle of the sky. While it was manifesting for a period of about two minutes it was slowly descending towards the ashram. A few minutes later a *sādhu* came and told me that Bhagavan had passed away. At the exact moment when he told me the news, my stomach pains vanished and never reappeared again.

Bhagavan was buried the following day. Swami Satyananda, one of my neighbours in Palakottu, assisted in the burial. I saw him returning to Palakottu at about 8.30 that evening, his whole body covered in *vibhūti* [sacred ash]. I naturally asked him how he had got into such a state.

'I put Bhagavan's body in the *samādhi* pit,' he said. 'Since devotees had put a lot of *vibhūti* there I inevitably got covered with it. Can you give me some water for a bath?'

Before I gave him the water I embraced him tightly in an attempt to cover my own body with this *vibhūti*. Since it had touched Bhagavan's body I regarded it as his final *prasād*.

I received two other forms of *prasād* that evening. A girl who used to work for me collected some of the water that had bathed Bhagavan's body and brought it to me. I drank it with great pleasure. Another woman who had a reputation for being slightly mad brought me one of the garlands that had adorned Bhagavan's dead body. So many people had wanted to garland him (something he never permitted while he was alive) each garland had to be removed to make way for the succeeding one. I plucked a few flowers from this garland and ate them. This water and the flowers were the last contact I had with Bhagavan's body. In the years that followed I tried to remain in contact with the real Bhagavan, the Bhagavan who exists eternally in the Heart.

## Diary Extracts

For the first ten years that I was at Ramanasramam (1928–38) Bhagavan made a point of keeping me busy all the time. If he ever saw that I had nothing to do he would usually think up new jobs for me, just to keep me occupied. Because of this I had very little leisure during this period. When I moved to Palakottu the situation was reversed: I had no work to do, except for my household chores, and almost unlimited free time. I decided to use this free time to meditate, to study the books that Bhagavan had prescribed for me, and to begin compiling a diary which would contain accounts of what Bhagavan had said or done. I began the diary in the second half of 1938 and made regular entries for about a year.

*Several of the stories in the preceding chapters were originally written in this diary in 1938 or 1939. Some of the other entries found their way into Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi (Talks 530–32 and 534–61).*

*Since that still left many interesting dialogues unpublished, I decided to include most of the remainder of the entries in this chapter.*

*The questions and answers given below do not purport to be a systematic account of Bhagavan's teachings. Rather, they are a fairly representative sample of the types of dialogue that took place in the old hall in the late 1930s.*

### 1

The following questions were asked by an aristocratic-looking American lady. Bhagavan's answers are a succinct summary of his practical teachings.

Question: What is the truth that I have to attain? Please explain it and show it to me.

Bhagavan: What we have to attain and what is desired by everyone is endless happiness. Although we seek to attain it in various ways, it is not something to be sought or attained as a new

experience. Our real nature is the 'I' feeling which is always experienced by everyone. It is within us and nowhere else. Although we are always experiencing it, our minds are wandering, always seeking it, thinking in ignorance that it is something apart from us. This is like a person saying with his own tongue that he has no tongue.

Question: If this is so, why did so many *sādhana*s [spiritual practices] come to be created?

Bhagavan: The *sādhana*s came to be formed only to get rid of the thought that it [the Self] is something to be newly attained. The root of the illusion is the thought which ignores the Self and which thinks instead, 'I am this body'. After this thought rises it expands in a moment into several thousand thoughts and conceals the Self. The reality of the Self will only shine if all these thoughts are removed. Afterwards, what remains is only *Brahmānanda* [the bliss of *Brahman*].

Question: I am now sitting peacefully without the thought 'I am this body'. Is this the state of reality?

Bhagavan: This state must remain as it is without any change. If it changes after a while you will know that other thoughts have not gone.

Question: What is the way to get rid of other thoughts?

Bhagavan: They can only be removed through the powerful effect of the enquiry, 'To whom have these thoughts come?'

The next day more doubts occurred to the American lady. She approached Bhagavan again and started to ask more questions.

Question: What is the way to see God?

Bhagavan: Where to see God? First, can you see yourself? If you can see yourself you can see God. Can anyone see his own eyes? Because they cannot be seen, can one say, 'I have no eyes'? Just like this, though seeing is always there, we cannot see God. To give up the thought that we are alien to God is to see God. The first and foremost wonder in this world is the thought, 'I am different from God'. There is no greater wonder than this.

There is a story in *Chāndōgya Upanishad* which explains this. A man who was sleeping soundly in his house began to dream. In

the dream somebody came and put some drug in his nose and then, after blindfolding his eyes and tying his hands, left him in the middle of a forest and went away. Without knowing the path to get back home, he wandered for a long time among the thorns and stones of the forest. Eventually he began to cry.

A *dēva* [spirit being] appeared and asked, 'Why are you crying? Who are you? Why did you come here?'

The blindfolded man gave the particulars of his name, village and so on.

Then he said, 'Someone came and deluded me with drugs, blindfolded my eyes, tied my hands, left me in the middle of the forest and went away.'

The *dēva* freed him from his ties, showed him a path and told him, 'If you follow this path you will reach your village'.

The man followed the instructions, reached his village and entered his own house. At that moment he woke up from his dream. He looked at the door and saw that it was locked from the inside. He realised that he had spent the whole night lying on his bed and that he had never been to a forest or returned from there. He understood that the cause of all his suffering was his *avichāra buddhi* [his lack of discerning enquiry].

The idea that we are separate from God and the idea that we have to undergo some arduous *sāadhanā* to reach Him are as false as the ideas that this man had in his dream. While he was lying comfortably in bed his imagination led him to believe that he was suffering in a forest and that he had to make a great effort to get back to bed again. One attains God and one remains in the state of Self when the thought of wanting to attain stops.

## 2

The following questions were put by Maurice Frydman:

Question: Sri Bhagavan has written [*Ulladu Nārpadu Anubandham*, verse 38] that one should not show *advaita* in one's activities. Why so? All are one. Why differentiate?

Bhagavan: Would you like to sit on the seat that I am sitting on?

Question: I don't mind sitting there. But if I came and sat there

the *sarvādhikārī* and the other people here would hit me and chase me away.

Bhagavan: Yes, nobody would allow you to sit here. If you saw someone molesting a woman would you let him go, thinking, 'All is one'? There is a scriptural story about this. Some people once gathered together to test whether it is true, as said in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that a *jnāni* sees everything as one. They took a brahmin, an untouchable, a cow, an elephant, and a dog to the court of King Janaka, who was a *jnāni*. When all had arrived King Janaka sent the brahmin to the place of brahmins, the cow to its shed, the elephant to the place allotted to elephants, the dog to its kennel and the untouchable person to the place where the other untouchables lived. He then ordered his servants to take care of his guests and feed them all appropriate food.

The people asked, 'Why did you separate them individually? Is not everything one and the same for you?'

'Yes, all are one,' replied Janaka, 'but self-satisfaction varies according to the nature of the individual. Will a man eat the straw eaten by the cow? Will the cow enjoy the food that a man eats? One should only give what satisfies each individual person or animal.'

Although the same man may play the role of all the characters in a play, his acts will be determined by the role that he is playing at each moment. In the role of a king he will sit on the throne and rule. If the same person takes on the role of a servant, he will carry the sandals of his master and follow him. His real Self is neither increased nor decreased while he plays these roles. The *jnāni* never forgets that he himself has played all these roles in the past.

### 3

Question: Bhagavan, I have read much of the *Vēdas* and the *sāstras* but no *Ātma jñāna* [Self-knowledge] has come to me. Why is this?

Bhagavan: *Ātma jñāna* will come to you only if it is there in the *sāstras* [scriptures]. If you see the *sāstras*, *sāstra jñāna* [knowledge of the scriptures] will come. If you see the Self, Self-knowledge will shine.

Question: How to see the Self?

Bhagavan: Everyone says 'I am'. How do we know that this is true? Do we know this by looking in the mirror or do we know it only after looking in the *sāstras*? Tell me.

If the Self is something to be seen, there should be two selves [the self which looks and the Self which is seen]. Would you agree that you have two 'I's'?

Question: No.

Bhagavan: The reality that exists is only one. Then how can there be another self which is to be seen? All are seeing the Self everywhere but they don't understand. What a pity! What to do? If the thought 'I am this body' is given up, what is seen is only the Self.

Question: What am I to do? What is my duty?

Bhagavan: Now you have nothing to do. Enquire 'Who am I?' Then, [when you have found out who you are] if there is still duty, it may be done.

#### 4

One night a devotee asked Sri Bhagavan, 'You have stated that *Ātma vidyā* [knowledge of the Self] is very easy.<sup>1</sup> How is this *Ātma vidyā* very easy?'

Bhagavan replied, 'As an example of direct perception everyone will quote the simile of the *nellikai* placed in the palm of the hand.<sup>2</sup> The Self is even more directly perceivable than the fruit on the palm. To perceive the fruit there must be the fruit, the palm to place it on and the eyes to see it. The mind should also be in the

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the refrain (*pallavi*) and the sub-refrain (*anupallavi*) of *Ātma Vidyā Kīrtanam*.

Self-knowledge is an easy thing,  
the easiest thing there is.

The Self is something that's entirely real  
even for the most ordinary man.

It could be said that a clear gooseberry [*nellikai*] is an illusion by comparison.

<sup>2</sup> A *nellikai* resembles a gooseberry except that it grows on a tree not a bush. If something is self-evident Tamils will often say, 'It's as clear as a *nellikai* on the palm of the hand'.

proper condition [to process the information]. Without any of these four things, even those with very little knowledge can say out of direct experience, “I am”. Because the Self exists just as the feeling “I am”, *Ātma vidyā* is very easy indeed. The easiest path is to see the one who is going to attain the *Ātma*.’

Another devotee asked a similar question a little later and Bhagavan gave a similar reply:

Question: Why cannot the Self be perceived directly?

Bhagavan: Only the Self is said to be directly perceived [*pratyaksha*].<sup>3</sup> Nothing else is said to be *pratyaksha*. Although we are having this *pratyaksha*, the thought ‘I am this body’ is veiling it. If we give up this thought, the *Ātma*, which is always within the direct experience of everyone, will shine forth.

Question: Sri Bhagavan has stated this so simply. But the thought ‘I am the body’ does not leave us.

Bhagavan: It is not leaving you because it is very strong.

Question: Why and how did that thought come into being?

Bhagavan: It came into being only through a lack of enquiry on your part. A verse in *Kuivalya Navanītam* [2.95] gives the same explanation:

Because its nature is not determinable, *māyā* is said to be inexpressible. They are in its grip who think: ‘This is mine—I am the body—the world is real.’ O son, no one can ascertain how this mysterious illusion came into being. As to why it arose it is because of the person’s lack of discerning enquiry.

If we see the Self the objects which are seen will not appear as separate from us. Having seen all the letters on a paper, we fail to

<sup>3</sup> In Indian philosophy the term *pratyaksha* is often used to indicate a direct experience of the senses. Thus, hearing a noise or tasting a particular flavour is *pratyaksha*. However, as Bhagavan has made clear in the previous answer, such experiences are indirect because they can only be experienced through the media of the senses and the mind. When the term *pratyaksha* was mentioned in conversation Bhagavan would usually remark that the subjective awareness of ‘I am’ is alone *pratyaksha* because all other experiences are mediated through the functions of the mind and the body.

see that paper which is the base. Likewise, suffering only arises because we see what is superimposed on the base without seeing the base itself. What is superimposed should not be seen without also seeing the substratum.

How were we in sleep? When we were asleep the various thoughts such as 'this body', 'this world' were not there. It should be difficult to identify with these states [waking and dreaming] that appear and disappear, [but everyone does it].

Everyone has the experience 'I always am'. In order to say 'I slept well,' 'I awoke,' 'I dreamt,' 'when unconscious I knew nothing,' it is necessary that one exists, and knows that one exists, in all these three states. If one seeks the Self, saying, 'I don't see myself,' where can one find it? To know that everything we see is the Self, it is enough that the I-am-the-body thought ceases to exist.

## 5

Question: What is *satsang*?

Bhagavan: *Satsang* means only *Ātma sang* [association with the Self]. Only those who cannot practise that are to practise being in the company of realised beings or *sādhus*.

Question: When does one get the company of *sādhus*?

Bhagavan: The opportunity to be in the company of a *Sadguru* comes effortlessly to those who have performed worship of God, *japa*, *tapas*, pilgrimages, etc. for long periods in their previous births. There is a verse by Tayumanuvar which points out the same thing: 'O Lord of the first and last, those who properly start the worship of idols, holy places and sacred waters will meet the *Sadguru* who will tell them the words of truth.'

Only he who has done plenty of *nishkāmya karmas* [actions performed without any thought of a reward or consequence] in previous births will get abundant faith in the Guru. Having faith in

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<sup>4</sup> Usually this means 'association with those who have realised the Self'. But since '*sat*' means 'being', 'truth' or 'reality', it can be translated more literally as 'association with being', or 'association with what is real'.

the Guru's words, such a man will follow the path and reach the goal of liberation.

Question: We are living in a place where there is no *sādhu*. What can we do? We cannot have the *darshan* of *sādhus* every day.

Bhagavan: What to do? Pictures, names of God and *pūjās* have been formed for this purpose. Only those who have attained the grace of Iswara will get the grace of the Guru. Only through the grace of the Guru can one attain the grace of the Self which is within. That alone is *mōksha* or liberation.

On another occasion Bhagavan explained the importance and the greatness of *satsang* by quoting from the *Sūta Samhitā*:

Those who are seen by the eyes of *jīvanmuktas* [those who are liberated while they are still alive] are freed from many kinds of sins and become themselves *jīvanmuktas*. The family of the *jīvanmukta* is purified. His mother herself is a person who has done what needs to be done. The whole earth is purified by him.

After saying that there were many other passages in the *Sūta Samhitā* which glorified *jñānis*, Bhagavan went on to say, 'When a *jñāni* is born in this world, the devotees, the disciples, those who are indifferent to God and even sinners are all benefited. The life histories of many people exemplify this.'

Since Bhagavan was so frequently extolling the greatness of *satsang* and grace, I once asked him, 'It is said that *mōksha* is attained easily only with the grace of the Guru. How is that so?'

Bhagavan replied, 'The house of *mōksha* is not anywhere outside. It is within everyone. Whoever has a strong desire to attain *mōksha* is being pulled by the Guru who is within. The Guru who is on the outside raises his hand and pushes him inwards. This is how the Guru's grace operates.'

Bhagavan then quoted two of his favourite verses from *Kaivalya Navanītam* in which the disciple thanks the Guru for giving him the grace which enabled him to realise the Self.

1.86 'Lord, you are the reality remaining as my inmost Self, ruling me during all my countless incarnations! Glory to you who have put on an external form in order to instruct me! I do not see how I can repay your grace for

having liberated me. Glory! Glory to your holy feet!

1.87 The Master beamed on him as he spoke, drew him near and said very lovingly: 'To stay fixed in the Self, without the three kinds of obstacles [ignorance, doubt and knowledge derived from false premises] obstructing your experience, is the highest return you can render me.'

## 6

Question: Is the appearance of the differentiated universe true or untrue?

Bhagavan: It depends on how we regard the terms true and untrue. If we look at *Brahman*, there is no universe.

Question: Then why does the universe appear?

Bhagavan: Appear to whom? The universe does not say 'I am'. Is there any evidence to say that the universe appears? To whom does this universe appear?

Question: To me.

Bhagavan: Who are you? Find out who you are. Then afterwards tell me if there is a universe.

Question: The state of *samādhi* has not yet come to me.

Bhagavan: That state does not come or go. It is our own ever-existing natural state.

Question: Swami, can I take up the *bhāvanā* [mental attitude] 'I am *Brahman*'?

Bhagavan: If you assume 'I am *Brahman*' you will receive many blows. Why? Because everything is already *Brahman*. Why should it be assumed? Is it necessary to assume 'I am a man'? If the thought 'I am the body' is there, then it is necessary to assume, 'No, I am not that'.

Question: Because I have a wife and children I have many problems. I cannot escape from them.

Bhagavan: The outer *samsāra* [mundane activities] cannot do anything to you. Only the inner *samsāra* must be given up.

Question: This only lasts for five minutes. Then it gets changed.

Bhagavan: [After keeping quiet for some time] This kind of thought must go.

7

A devotee from Trichy brought his son into the hall. After doing *namaskāram* to Bhagavan he sat down. The boy, though he was still very young, was clearly showing signs that he was very worried.

After the two of them had sat down, Bhagavan enquired, 'Which train did you come on?'

The devotee replied, 'We came at 8:30 this morning'.

Bhagavan then asked, 'How is Dattatreya [the boy with the worried look]?'

The devotee answered, 'Having unsuccessfully tried all sorts of medicines and *mantras*, we have come to Sri Bhagavan as a last resort'. As he was saying this he folded his hands in a gesture of supplication.

Sri Bhagavan spoke to the boy: 'Having the name Dattatreya, why should you worry like this? You should always be blissful. Instead of that, why should you spoil the bliss with the mind?'

Bhagavan then narrated to the boy and to all the other devotees the history of the great *jñāni* Dattatreya who lived in ancient days.

'Dattatreya used to wander the forests without even a loin-cloth. He was always full of the bliss of *Brahman*. Seeing this, Yadu Maharaj [a local ruler] thought to himself, "How is it that he is always blissful? I have everything but I still have to suffer."

'Filled with this thought he went to Dattatreya one day and asked him, "How is it that you are always full of bliss?"

'Dattatreya replied, "What is there other than bliss?"

'The king asked him, "How did this bliss come to you?"

'Dattatreya replied, "To acquire this *ānanda* [bliss] I had a number of *āchāryas* [teachers]. It came through them."

'When the king asked him who his teachers had been, Dattatreya told him a long story.

"O King, I have twenty-four Gurus. They were grasped by the

enquiry made by my intellect. I am wandering in this world as a *mukta* [liberated one] only because of the *jnāna* I gained through these *āchāryas*. Understand who these *āchāryas* are: the earth, the air, the sky, water, fire, the sun, the moon, a wild pigeon, a python, the ocean, a grasshopper, a bee, an elephant, a honey gatherer, a deer, Pingala the prostitute, a child, a small girl, an archer, a snake and a few others. Among the twenty-four I have rejected a few.

— “I have learned patience from the earth, omnipresence from air, non-attachment from the sky, taintlessness from fire, purity from water, and the truth that all changes are for the body and not the Self from the moon.

— “The sun shines equally on all things but it is not affected by them. From this I learned that though the yogi may see objects he should not be affected by the *gunas* which cause them to interact.

— “From the wild pigeon I learned that whoever gets attached to his residence will slip down from his elevated position. I understood that, like the python, one must take whatever food comes by itself. From the ocean I understood that I should be placid, majestic, unperturbed and difficult to fathom.

— “The grasshopper which falls into the flame of the lamp burns to death. From this I understood that a man who falls into the fire of lust for women perishes. I learned from the bee that one should get food just sufficient to nourish one’s body without forcing others to give.

— “Even the strong male elephant undergoes suffering by coming into contact with the female elephant. From this I learned that a man is likewise subjected to suffering if he is touched by a woman or spends time in their proximity.

— “The honey collected by bees over many days is stolen by the honey gatherer. From him I learned that wealth earned by great hardship is often stolen by other people.

— “The deer gets caught in the hunter’s net after being enticed by the hunter’s music. Similarly, a *sannyāsin* will fall into bondage if he gives way to *mōha* [delusion caused by desire]. Therefore, from the deer I understood that a *sannyāsin* should not take notice of sense objects.

— “Unable to conquer its tongue, the fish dies after getting caught on the hook. I learned from the fish that anyone who does not conquer his tongue [that is, his desire for tasty things] will suffer. One must conquer the tongue.

“Pingala the courtesan, after nicely decorating herself, was once strolling about while she was waiting for a lover who had promised to bring her money. When he didn’t turn up she became very sad and dejected. Her face turned pale and her mind was distressed. She investigated the cause of her distress and understood the painful nature of petty pleasures. When she found that the source of all happiness is the supreme Self, she attained *vairāgya* [detachment]. By worshipping the supreme Self as her husband she attained the true happiness of *jnāna*. From Pingala the courtesan I have learned that there is no happiness in anything external and that the only worthy attainment is the happiness of the Self.

“I learned from the child that one should be oblivious to honour and dishonour.

“Now I will tell you the story of the small girl. At a time when her parents were not in the village, a number of people came to take her in marriage. She wanted to feed them but when she started milling the paddy by herself to get rice to cook for them, she became shy because her bangles were making a lot of noise. After removing one from each hand there was no further noise. From this act of the small girl I understood that a yogi should remain alone.

“From the arrow maker I learned that one should be one-pointed in one’s aims.

“The snake lives happily in the hole made by the rat. From that snake I learned to live happily in other’s houses.

“I have a twenty-fifth guru; that is my body. This body is the cause of my *jnāna* and my *vairāgya*. Having merged in Hari [God], the Self, with love and devotion, my state is now equal to the one who knows nothing.”

‘In this way Dattatreya taught Yadu Maharaj all the *jnāna* he had grasped through his twenty-five gurus and ended his story.’

Having told the boy all the *upadēsas* [teachings] which Dattatreya told to the king, Bhagavan asked him graciously, ‘You are also called Dattatreya aren’t you? At least for your name’s sake you must be happy.’

Question: God is omnipresent. Why should He become an *avatāra* [incarnate in a physical body] age after age? Couldn't He perform His function just by being present everywhere?

Bhagavan: By the order of Iswara, authorised beings [*adhikāri-ka purushas*] along with their devotees, are sent to take birth on earth. These beings become *avatāras* in order to give their grace to those who have done *nishkāmya punya* [meritorious acts done without any desire for reward]. They also come to punish sinners. When they have accomplished the mission for which they came, they go back to their own earlier positions. Though different bodies come to the *avatāra purushas* their experience of the unity of the Self never changes. A man, after being born, undergoes the various stages of life—childhood, youth, manhood and old age—but in all these stages the thought that he is the same person who was born remains unchanged. Likewise, the *avatāra purushas* knowingly remain as the one Self even though they go through many births. For them it is rather like seeing ten different dreams in one night.

All these questions will not occur when you know yourself. Without knowing the truth about oneself it is a waste of time trying to understand the differing teachings of other people.

Question: What is the difference between Iswara [God] and the *mukta* [the liberated one]?

Bhagavan: Iswara and the *jnāni* are one and the same except that the *mukta* was at first forgetful of the Self. Later by the strength of his practice, he eventually came to know the Self. For Iswara it was not like that. Being the eternally liberated [*nitya mukta*], God is performing the *pancha kriyās* [the five-fold functions of creation, preservation, destruction, veiling and grace]. Because of this, his *vritti* [functioning] is called *Brahmākāra vritti* [activity in the form of *Brahman*]. That is like calling the river which has merged in the sea *samudrākāra nadi* [the river in the form of the ocean]. The *vritis* [activities or functioning] of Iswara and the *jnāni* are one and the same. But for the *avatāra purushas* the bodies will change until the end of the *kalpa*.<sup>5</sup> This does not happen with the *jnānis*.

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<sup>5</sup> A *kalpa*, the largest time unit in Hindu cosmology, is generally reckoned to be several billion years long. At the end of each *kalpa* all the beings in the universe are dissolved in the formless *Brahman*. This is called *mahā pralaya*, or the great dissolution. Some time later a new *kalpa* begins and new beings are created.

At this point I interjected with a question of my own: 'Sri Rama must have had the I-am-the-body idea as soon as he was born. Is this not correct?'

Bhagavan seemed to disagree: 'Sri Rama first gave *darshan* to Kausalya [his mother] as Vishnu; only then did he take *avatāra*. Later, when Rama was in the forest, he was wandering everywhere searching for [the kidnapped] Sita. Then Parvati [who was watching from heaven] asked Iswara, "Doesn't Rama [who is an *avatāra* and therefore perfect] know where Sita is? Why should he wander about searching for her?"

'In reply Iswara told her, "Go and appear before Rama in the form of Sita. Then you will understand."

'Parvati did as he suggested but Rama completely ignored her. He just went on searching for Sita.'

Bhagavan then went back to the second question and read us a verse from *Kaivalya Navanītam* [2.36] which states that Iswara and the *jnāni* are equal:

Disciple: 'O Master, you who are formless function as Iswara and appear in human form [here]. You speak of a *jnāni* and Iswara as the same. How can they be so?'

Master: 'Yes. Iswara and the *jnāni* are the same because they are free from 'I' and 'mine'. The *jnāni* is himself Iswara, the totality of the *jīvas* and also the cosmos.'

## 9

In August 1939 I asked Bhagavan a question about *karma*: 'Bhagavan says that when one attains *jnāna* all the three *karmas*'<sup>\*</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> Sri Rama, the seventh *avatāra* of Vishnu, was initially not aware of his divinity. It is only towards the end of the *Rāmāyana* (meaning 'Rama's Way') that he became aware of who he really was. It is therefore reasonable to infer that he, like other mortals, initially identified himself with the I-am-the-body idea.

<sup>7</sup> This story took place during the time when Rama was supposedly not aware that he was an *avatāra*. Bhagavan seems to be suggesting that if he had not been aware of his real nature at this time, the gods would have found it easy to fool him.

<sup>\*</sup> 1. *Sanchita karma*: the store of karmic debts accumulated from previous births.

2. *Prārabdha karma*: that part of one's *sanchita karma* which must be worked out in the present life. Because the law of *karma* implies determinism, *prārabdha* is often translated as destiny.

3. *Āgāmya karma*: new *karma* accumulated in the present lifetime which is carried forward into future lives.

cease to be. But in *Kaivalya Navanītam* [1.103] it is stated that the *jñāni* will experience only *prārabdha karma*. Why does it say this?

Bhagavan replied, '*Prārabdha* is the rule prior to the attainment of *jñāna*. As such, even after the attainment of *jñāna*, a *jñāni* appears to be experiencing *prārabdha* in the sight of onlookers. There are several examples which are commonly used to explain this: an electric fan goes on spinning for some time even after it is switched off; a burnt rope looks like a rope but it cannot be used to tie anything; a tree that has been felled looks just like a living tree but it is no longer alive; peas which are roasted still look like peas but they cannot sprout.

'The *prārabdha* of a *jñāni* can be compared to examples such as these. When other people look at a *jñāni* it seems to them that he is experiencing *prārabdha* but from the *jñāni*'s own point of view there is no *prārabdha* at all.'

Two months earlier I had asked Bhagavan a similar question: 'In the *sāstras* it is stated that even the *jīvanmukta* will behave according to his *prārabdha*. Why is Bhagavan telling us that a *jñāni* has no *prārabdha*?'

On that occasion Bhagavan had replied, 'For the *jñāni* there is neither *sāstra* nor *prārabdha*. Questions like this have no relevance for the *jñāni*. All these rules in the *sāstras* were created only for the *ajñānis* [those who are not *jñānis*]. Let me give you an example. Let us say that a man has three wives. When the man dies who will agree with us if we say that only two of his former wives are widows. Is it not correct that all three of them are widows?' Likewise, for the *jñāni* all the three kinds of *karma* are non-existent. *Prārabdha* is only for those who see this problem and ask questions about it.'

## 10

Bhagavan was frequently asked questions about the state of the *jñāni*. He quite often gave evasive answers or asked the questioner to find out who was asking the question, but I can remember one

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<sup>9</sup> This was Bhagavan's favourite answer to this question (see *Ulladu Nārpadu* v. 33). Bhagavan was frequently asked questions about the *prārabdha* of *jñānis* because it was widely known that his views on this subject differed from those of many other *advaita* teachers.

occasion when he volunteered some information himself without being asked by anyone. While he was looking at a small child in the hall he suddenly remarked, 'One can attain the bliss of *Brahman* only when the mind becomes pure and humble, like this child's'.

This prompted me to ask, 'What is the difference between a child and a *jnāni*?'

Sri Bhagavan replied, 'The child is an ignorant child because of *ajnāna* whereas the *jnāni* is a wise child because of *jnāna*'.

Some time later a devotee asked Bhagavan, 'Why does a *jnāni* appear to bestow his grace on some people and show anger to others? Why does the *jnāni* not correct all those who come to him? What is it that *jnānis* work for?'<sup>10</sup>

Bhagavan answered: 'The maturity and past *karma* of each *sādhaka* is different. Because of this *jnānis* must speak in different ways to different people.'

Then he quoted five verses from *Kaivalya Navanītam*:

2.60 Disciple: 'O Master, who are bliss incarnate, how is it that God, who is impartial, advances a few and degrades others?'

Master: 'He is like the father who encourages his sons who are on the right path and who frowns on the other sons who are going in the wrong direction. Know that it is very merciful to punish the erring and turn them towards righteousness.'

2.61 'O son, whose fetters of worldly life are broken! The celestial wish-fulfilling tree, fire, and water protect those who seek them by fulfilling their desires, keeping them warm and quenching their thirst. So also Iswara is kind to his devotees and not so to others. Now think well and judge whose fault it is.'

2.50 Master: 'My son, the *jīvas* are unlimited, and their

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<sup>10</sup> Although the questioner is not criticising Bhagavan directly, he is obliquely hinting that Bhagavan should punish his errant devotees. Bhagavan's attitude to punishment can be gauged from the following extract from *Arunachala Ramana* (August, 1983, p.22).

'Once someone complained to Bhagavan about the irregularities and corruption in the ashram.

'Bhagavan replied, "I did not come here to punish you. If I start punishing people not even a crow would be able to rest in the ashram."'

actions are also similarly unlimited. In three sections [*karma*, *upāsana* and *jnāna*] the beneficent *Vēdas* prescribe according to the aptitudes of seekers, with preliminary views succeeded by final conclusions, as flowers by fruits.'

2.59 Those fools head for disaster who, in their ignorance, attribute to God the six evils [lust, anger, greed, delusion, conceit and jealousy], which are of their own making, but the wise will gain untainted deliverance by recognising that the same evils are of their own making and not God's.

2.35 'My good boy, hear me further. The activities of the sage are solely for the uplift of the world. He does not stand to lose or gain anything. The Almighty, who is the only store of grace for the world, is not affected by the merits or demerits of the beings in the world.'<sup>11</sup>

## 11

Question: Bhagavan, I want to attain *mukti*. For that you alone are my Guru. I do not seek anyone else. Kindly bestow your grace on me.

Bhagavan: The attainment of *mukti* is not some new achievement. We are all in the form of *mukti*. Because we forget this and instead wrongly think, 'I am this body,' many thousands of thoughts arise in wave after wave and conceal what we really are. *Mukti* will only shine when this thought ['I am the body'] is destroyed.

Question: How does one get rid of this thought, 'I am the body'?

Bhagavan: Since you have prayed to the Guru, totally surrender to him.

Question: The Guru is not in the village where I live. What can I do?

Bhagavan: The Guru is within you. Surrender to him there.

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<sup>11</sup> This sequence of verses is clearly a not-too-subtle reproof for the questioner who clearly believed that Bhagavan needed to change his behaviour.

Question: What is within me is only my own Self.

Bhagavan: Guru, *Ātma*, Iswara—these are only different names for the same thing. The essence of each is the same.

Question: After I surrender, will it be possible for me to carry on with my work?

Bhagavan: Of course! But the thought 'I am doing it' will not arise.

Question: If the 'I'-thought is not there, how will my duties get done?

Bhagavan: Whatever you get paid for, you do with indifference. Discharge your family duties with the same indifference that you discharge your office work. The things that come and go in your office don't cause you to worry. Do all your jobs and duties with this same detachment.

Question: Difficulties keep coming to me. When will they stop?

Bhagavan: If you give up the I-am-the-body idea all your difficulties will fly away.

## 12

Question: I am thinking of leaving my village to go into a forest to perform *tapas*. I have decided to go with the permission of Sri Bhagavan.

Bhagavan: One may leave the village but one cannot leave oneself. If the village exists apart from oneself, it may be left. To live alone at the place of Self is like living in the forest. If you leave the Self, even if you go and live in a forest, it will be the same as living in a city.

The one who thinks that he is a *sannyāsin* is not a *sannyāsin*. The householder who does not think that he is a householder is a *sannyāsin*.

The one who does not think that he is the one who is doing all his actions is superior to the one who thinks that he has renounced everything.

## 13

Bhagavan sometimes said, '*Mauna* [silence] is ceaseless speech. To remain still is to work ceaselessly.'

This was one of several perplexing statements that Bhagavan occasionally made about *mauna*, a term which he frequently used as a synonym for the Self. I had understood some of Bhagavan's statements about *mauna* such as, '*Mauna* is the *sāadhanā* for acquiring all kinds of [spiritual] wealth,' but I was puzzled by his statements to the effect that silence is the equivalent of ceaseless speech and ceaseless work. Once, as Bhagavan was returning from one of his walks, I told him about my doubts.

'Bhagavan says that to be still means to be ever active, and that to be silent means to be ever speaking. I don't understand how this can be so.'

'Is that so?' answered Bhagavan. 'Can you see that "I am"?'

'Yes, I can see,' I said.

'How do you see?' asked Bhagavan.

I confessed that I did not know how it was seen.

Bhagavan gave me an explanation: 'Just like that, "to be still" means "to be ever working". Working does not mean working with a hoe in one's hand. Working means to shine always as "That" [the Self]. Only silence is ever speaking. Moreover, both are the same. This is just what the great sages have expressed as, "I am remembering without forgetting," "I am worshipping without becoming separate," "I am thinking without thinking," "I am telling without telling," "I am listening without listening," and so on. If you don't speak, God will come and speak. The greatest scripture is the silent exposition. Only if you read this scripture will all doubts cease. Otherwise, even if you read *crores* [tens of millions] of books countless times, doubts will never cease.'

Bhagavan once gave a similar answer to a devotee who began by complaining, 'I do not know where this "I" is.'

Bhagavan answered him by saying, 'Be where the "I" is'.

The following day the same man told Bhagavan, 'I do not know whether to go back to my village and do my work or just keep quiet'.

Bhagavan said, 'Eating, bathing, going to the toilet, talking, thinking, and many other activities related to the body are all work. How is it that the performance of one particular act is alone

work? To be still is to be always engaged in work. To be silent is to be always talking.'

## 14

One day a woman who was a dedicated Congress Party worker came to Sri Bhagavan for his *darshan*.

After remaining in the hall for some time, she asked Bhagavan, 'Many great sages like you have toured around giving lectures which pass on beneficial wisdom to the people of the world. You have attained *jnāna* for yourself but you sit in a corner keeping quiet. Of what benefit is this to the world?'

Bhagavan replied, 'To know the Self and to remain in the state of Self is alone the greatest benefit a person can give to the world. All the lectures delivered from the stage will be effective for some people only for as long as the person is on the platform. But the lecture of silence can always be heard all over the world. It will always be effective.'

The silence that Bhagavan was referring to was inner silence rather than outer silence. Bhagavan liked people to keep inner silence but he generally disapproved if they asked his permission to keep outer silence as well. However, in my case, he seemed to approve. When I once informed Bhagavan that I had decided to observe *mauna* from the next day onwards, he blessed me by saying, 'Aha! Very good!'

But then he asked me, 'Why? Where are you going? Are you not staying here?'

I replied, 'Even if I am here, some people, of their own accord, come to me to waste time in gossip. It is only because of this that I thought that it would be good to take *mauna vratam* [a vow of silence].'

Bhagavan indicated that he was satisfied with my reply.

Two days before this incident I had tried to give Bhagavan some nungus [palmyra fruits]. I had stored them on Mr Cohen's veranda in Palakottu because it was a convenient place to intercept Bhagavan on his daily walk. When Bhagavan came past he looked at me suspiciously and asked me several times, 'Why have you come here?'

After some hesitation I told Bhagavan, 'I came here to cut and give these nungus to Bhagavan'.

Bhagavan accepted the fruits, but as he was receiving them he laughingly said, 'You should have eaten them yourself and while you were eating them you should have had the thought, "I am also Bhagavan".'

Bhagavan's reluctance to eat soon disappeared. He dug out many of the fruits with his fingers and sucked the juice. Finally, after exclaiming '*Appadi!* [an expression of contentment] I cannot carry the stomach,' he walked away.

## 15

One evening, while I was accompanying Bhagavan on one of his walks, I asked him, 'When I meditate my breath seems to get suspended in my stomach. Is this good?'

Bhagavan replied, 'That is very good'.

Cheered by this positive comment I asked him a further question: 'If I go on meditating after that, what will happen?'

'*Samādhi* will be attained,' replied Bhagavan.

'Does *samādhi* mean that one is unaware of everything?' I asked.

'No,' said Bhagavan. 'Meditation will go on without our effort. That is *samādhi*.'

'Then what is *sahaja samādhi*?' I asked.

Bhagavan answered by saying, 'In that state meditation will always be going on. In that state the thought, "I am meditating," or "I am not meditating" will not occur.'

I then asked Bhagavan about periods in my meditation when I was only aware of an all-pervasive blankness.

'Sometimes nothing is seen,' I said. 'Is this good?'

Bhagavan did not seem to approve of these states. 'In the beginning,' he said, 'it is good if meditators meditate with self-awareness.'

The state of *sahaja samādhi* continued to intrigue me. A few weeks later I asked him another question about it. 'Can one practise *sahaja samādhi* right from the beginning?'

Bhagavan replied by saying that one could.

'But how to practise it?' I asked. 'And how does one practise *nirvikalpa samādhi*? How many different kinds of *samādhi* are there?'

'There is only one kind of *samādhi*,' said Bhagavan, 'not many

kinds. To remain temporarily subsided in the reality, without any thought, is *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Permanently abiding in the Self without forgetting it is *sahaja samādhi*. Both will give the same happiness.'

## 16

Bhagavan once made the following remarks about the waking and dream states.

'The world vision which appears in the waking state and the world vision which appears in the dream state are both the same. There is not even a trace of a difference. The dream state happens merely to prove the unreality of the world which we see in the waking state. This is one of the operations of God's grace.

'The world of the waking state changes in the same way as the world of the dream state. Both are equally insubstantial and equally unreal.

'Some people dispute this by saying, "But the same world which we saw yesterday is existing today. Dream worlds are never the same from one night to the next. Therefore how can we believe that the world of the waking state is unreal? History tells us that this world has existed for thousands of years."

'We take the evidence that this changing world has been existing for a long time and decide that this constitutes a proof that the world is real. This is an unjustified conclusion.<sup>12</sup>

'The world is changing every minute. How? Our body is not the same as it was when we were young. A lamp which we light at night may seem to be the same in the morning but all the oil in the flame has changed. Is this not so? Water flows in a river. If we see

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<sup>12</sup> Bhagavan, along with many other Indian teachers, maintained that anything that varies or changes cannot be real. In his view immutability is one of the hallmarks of reality. Those who uphold this view say that since the Self alone is unchanging, the Self alone is real. Proponents of *advaita*, the philosophy that maintains that the formless Self alone is real and that there is nothing separate or apart from it, say that the appearance of an ever-changing world is an illusion generated by the mind.

Bhagavan, who vigorously upheld the teachings of *advaita*, maintained that both the mind and the world are ultimately unreal since they are nothing more than illusory appearances in the unchanging Self.

the river on two successive days we say it is the same river, but it is not the same; the water has completely changed.

‘The world is always changing. It is not permanent. But we exist unchanged in all the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping. Nobody can truthfully say, “I did not exist during these three states”. Therefore we must conclude that this “I” is the permanent substance because everything else is in a state of perpetual flux. If you never forget this, this is liberation.’

Since this view of the world is so contrary to what we regard as common sense, Bhagavan was frequently questioned about it. Even his long-term devotees sometimes tried to get him to modify his views a little. I remember, for instance, one evening in the hall when Major Chadwick tried to persuade Bhagavan that the world did have some reality and permanence.

‘If the world exists only when my mind exists,’ he began, ‘when my mind subsides in meditation or sleep, does the outside world disappear also? I think not. If one considers the experiences of others who were aware of the world while I slept, one must conclude that the world existed then. Is it not more correct to say that the world got created and is ever existing in some huge collective mind? If this is true how can one say that there is no world and that it is only a dream?’

Bhagavan refused to modify his position. ‘The world does not say that it was created in the collective mind or that it was created in the individual mind. It only appears in your small mind. If your mind gets destroyed, there will be no world.’

To illustrate this truth Bhagavan narrated a story.

‘Long ago there was a man whose father had died thirty years before. One day he had a dream in which his father was alive. In the dream he [the man who had the dream] was a boy who had four younger brothers. His dream father had accumulated a great fortune which he divided among the five brothers. The four younger brothers were not satisfied with their share. Out of jealousy they came to fight with the eldest brother and began to beat him up. As he was receiving the beating in the dream he woke up.

‘On waking up he very happily realised that he had neither a father nor any brothers. He discovered that of all of the characters he had dreamt, he alone really existed.

‘Similarly, if we go beyond this waking dream and see only our

real Self we will discover that there is no world and that there are no 'other people'. On the other hand, if we move away from the Self and see the world, we find that we are in bondage.'

Bhagavan summarised these views a little later by saying, 'Every *jīva* [individual self] is seeing a separate world but a *jnāni* does not see anything other than himself. This is the state of truth.'

17

One day I asked Bhagavan, 'I often get stomach pains. What should I do about them?' I was hoping that he would suggest some medicine.

Bhagavan replied, 'What to do about it? The body itself is a big disease. To destroy this disease all we have to do is keep quiet. All other diseases will then leave even earlier.'

Then, as a joke, he remarked, 'You come and tell me about your diseases. Whom can I tell about the diseases that I have?'

Bhagavan never complained when he was ill. I remember one period when he suffered from piles for a long time without bothering to tell anyone. When the ailment was discovered, some devotees prepared some medicine and gave it to Madhava Swami, telling him to give it to Bhagavan twice a day.

Madhava Swami told Bhagavan that he must take this medicine but Bhagavan refused, saying, 'Don't make any medicine for my sake and then give it to me. Taking medicine only increases the disease. As the donkey [the disease] came, so it will go. Let me put up with it till it goes away. You need not make any recommendations.'

After that he refused even to look at the medicine. Bhagavan finally said that he would take the medicine if all the devotees in the hall were given an equal share. Since we all wanted Bhagavan to get well, we all agreed to undergo the treatment collectively.

18

Bhagavan often said that since there was no suffering in the Self, all suffering must inevitably be a product of the mind.

When I once asked him, 'Is there no way to escape from

worldly suffering?’ he gave me a typical reply: ‘The only remedy is to remain in the state of Self without losing awareness of it.’

The problem of suffering was a popular topic of conversation in the hall since none of us, except for Bhagavan, was immune from the occasional bout of mental turmoil. The following questions and answers, which I jotted down at various times, contain a typical selection of Bhagavan’s answers to devotees who wanted to understand or transcend suffering.

Question: Bhagavan, all through my life I have been experiencing nothing but suffering. Is it due to the sinful *karma* of my previous births? I once asked my mother whether I had been happy in her womb. She told me that she had suffered a great deal at that time. How is it that I have acquired so many sins? Why do I suffer so much?

Bhagavan: We could say that it is due to *pūrva karma* [past *karma*]. But instead of thinking that this *pūrva karma* is due to the *karma* of, for example, the incarnation previous to the last, find out to whom this present incarnation has come. If this body is what has taken birth, let it ask the question. You say that you are always experiencing suffering. That is only your thoughts. Happiness alone exists. What comes and goes is suffering.

Question: How is it that so much suffering comes to people who behave virtuously?

— Bhagavan: It is good if suffering comes to devotees. The *dhōbi* [washerman], when washing clothes, beats them hard against a rock. But he does so only to remove the dirt from the clothes. Similarly, all sufferings are given for the sole purpose of purifying the mind of the devotee. If we are patient, happiness will follow.

— The next two questions were asked by me on different occasions.

Question: Happiness and suffering occur according to one’s previous *karma*. If one has a desire for events to happen in a particular way, will they end that way?

Bhagavan: If a person has done a lot of *punya* [good deeds] in the past, right at this moment whatever he thinks will happen. But he will not be changing what is destined. Whatever he desires will conform to what is to happen anyway. His desires will conform to

that which was already determined by the desire or will of the Supreme. If there is plenty of *pāpam* [accumulated sins], the fruits of these acts will also materialise right now. The fruits of excessive *punya* and *pāpam* which have been carried forward from past lives will materialise in this birth. For Vidyaranya Swami it rained gold.<sup>13</sup>

Question: When one person does good deeds, suffering comes to him. But another person who does many bad deeds may not suffer at all. Why is this?

Bhagavan: Everyone is getting happiness and suffering as a result of the *karma* which has been carried forward from previous births. Accepting both patiently and remaining in the Self, doing whatever actions one happens to be engaged in without seeking happiness or suffering in them, that alone is good.

The enquiry 'Who am I?' leads to the cessation of suffering and the acquisition of the supreme bliss.

## 19

Question: [a scholar from Kerala] I am trying to follow the path of virtue but I am finding it impossible. My *pūrva saṃskāras* [previous mental habits] are preventing me. When will they disappear?

Bhagavan: Ask yourself 'Who am I?' Your *pūrva saṃskāras* will disappear when you find out who has them.

Question: When I meditate, sleep overpowers me. I cannot avoid it. What should I do?

Bhagavan: If I say 'I awoke,' it follows that 'I slept'. When waking comes we must be in the state that we were in when we were asleep. When sleep comes we must awake. That is the state of awakened sleep.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A full account of this story is given on pages 275–6.

<sup>14</sup> Bhagavan often said that devotees should be in a state he called 'waking or wakeful sleep'. During deep sleep the mind rests in the Self but it is not conscious of the bliss or peace that exists there. Bhagavan maintained that if one could make the mind sink completely into the Self without losing consciousness one would

Question: That is not possible for me.

Bhagavan: The greatest obstacle is the thought, 'It is impossible for me'.

Question: What to do when this thought catches hold of us and shakes us?

Bhagavan: The thought does not catch hold of us and shake us. The thought catching hold of us shakes itself.

Question: If this is so, how can I control the mind?

Bhagavan: Controlling the mind implies the need of a second mind to control the first. Trying to control the mind is like someone attempting the impossible task of measuring the length of his own shadow by himself.

How were we in sleep? We are now the same [bodiless and mindless] 'I' that we were when we were asleep. Our first mistake is to leave that state and take the body to be 'I'.

Question: *Ajnāna* [ignorance] must be destroyed. Am I right?

Bhagavan: It will be sufficient if you investigate the one whose *ajnāna* must be destroyed.

## 20

Bhagavan: When I was living in Virupaksha Cave many people used to come there with various kinds of snacks and meals. Many of the visitors would force me to eat big meals which had many special items like vadaï and payasam. One day I decided to fast so that I could give my stomach a complete rest. I knew that it was dangerous to stay at Virupaksha Cave because visitors might turn up with food for me, so I went for a long walk through the forest on the south-west side of the hill. As I was walking through the middle of this forest seven women followed me, each with a

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enjoy the bliss of conscious sleep. Two similar terms are used to cover this experience: retaining full consciousness during sleep is called 'wakeful sleep'; making the mind stay in the Self during the waking state is called 'sleeping while being awake'. Although the names are different, the experience of consciousness in both states is the same.

bundle on her head. When they saw me I heard them speaking among themselves.

‘The one who is walking ahead of us is our Swami.’

When they had satisfied themselves that I was ‘the Swami’, they came running towards me.

One of them said, ‘Swami, please sit down and take some of our food’.

One woman gave me iddlies, a second gave me murukku, a third gave me dosa<sup>15</sup> and so on. In this way they competed with each other to serve me their various items.

After eating and thinking, ‘Ah! What a good fast I had today,’ I started walking away from them.

I had the idea of escaping from them but the ladies called after me, ‘Swami, you must be ready for our lunch at noon. We will not leave you.’ Then they walked away in the direction of the hill.

Thinking that I must not get caught by them later in the day, I walked slowly for a short distance and then sat down at the foot of a tree to rest in the shade. At about twelve o’clock the women came out of the forest and walked straight towards me. As they were approaching me they insisted that I take them to a place where they could find drinking water. I took them to Sona Teertham in the forest, thinking to myself, ‘What a wonderful *upavāsam* [fast] I am having today’.

When the women had finished drinking they asked me to sit down and eat. A banana leaf was spread in front of me and dishes of all the six tastes<sup>16</sup> including rice, vegetables, sambar, rasam, vadaï and payasam were served to me.

I thought to myself, ‘O my Lord! What I ate this morning was sufficient for three days. How am I to eat all this?’ I felt as if I were being choked.

‘Swami,’ one of the women enquired, ‘why are you looking like this? Eat as if we were all Unnamulai<sup>17</sup> serving you.’ Thus the ladies gave me some *upadēsa* [spiritual teaching].

As soon as I had finished eating they started to leave, saying, ‘Swami, since the day of our birth we never came to this forest

<sup>15</sup> A murukku is a hard, crunchy deep-fried savoury; a dosa is a pancake made out of rice and black-gram flour.

<sup>16</sup> Sweet, sour, salty, bitter, astringent and pungent.

<sup>17</sup> Unnamulai is the local name for Parvati, the consort of Siva.

before, but today we came here to pluck leaves.' Suddenly they all vanished.

'Oh! These are tricky people,' I thought and continued my *pradakshina* by walking slowly through the forest. Then, with the intention of going to the Vetrilai Mandapam to sit down, I came out of the forest.

Meanwhile, a devotee called Ramaswami Aiyer had bought two mangoes as big as pumpkins. He had made rasam out of the mangoes and brought it to Virupaksha Cave along with some rice which he had cooked.

As I was not there he enquired, 'Where is Swami?'

Hearing the people there say, 'Swami may have gone for *pradakshina* of the hill,' he thought, 'Swami will be going round the hill clockwise. I will go anticlockwise, meet him and give him this rasam and rice.'

Ramaswami Aiyer found me just as I came out of the forest. On seeing me he immediately said, 'Swami, I went to Virupaksha Cave to see you but I couldn't find you. So I came here searching for you on the *pradakshina* route. You must please take this mango rasam and rice.'

I told him all the incidents of the day, including how much I had eaten, but he would not listen to any of my excuses. He insisted that I must eat some of his food.

I ate a little of it before saying, 'Enough! Enough! Today's punishment has been very good!' Then I started to come back to Virupaksha Cave, hardly able to walk.

Bhagavan then went on to describe another incident which happened around 1903.

One day Palaniswami [his attendant at the time], another man and myself were walking on the southern side of the hill along the bank of a brook. We saw an old lady breaking dry twigs for firewood at the top of a tree. I looked up to see who was collecting twigs for firewood at such a great height. Immediately the woman turned and looked at me.

Stretching out both her hands she gave me *upadēsa*: 'Hey you! May you be thrown on the funeral pyre!<sup>18</sup> Why are you wandering

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<sup>18</sup> In Tamil this is a genial but rather vulgar curse. Even though it was said in jest, it was very unusual for a poor working woman to address a Swami in this way.

all over the forest instead of sitting quietly in the place where you are?’

‘Mother,’ I replied, ‘you are right. I am doing wrong; wrong indeed. I will slap myself in punishment.’

As I was thinking about this matter I turned to look up at the old woman but she was not to be seen anywhere.

‘Oh! She is another tricky lady!’ we concluded.<sup>19</sup> Then, after roaming all over the forest for a while, we came back to Virupaksha Cave.

## 21

When a visitor asked Bhagavan about *siddhis* [supernatural powers] he replied, ‘To remain unchanged in the state of Self is the eternal *siddhi*, the greatest of all *siddhis*. All other *siddhis* are only the *prārabdha* of the *jñāni* who has realised the truth. These other *siddhis* are trivial.’

This was very similar to an answer I had received myself a few weeks before. When I had asked Bhagavan about *siddhis* he had replied, ‘Practising of *siddhis* will only fatten the ego still more. The greatest *siddhi* is not to see anything other than the Self. All the *siddhis* will come and wait upon the perfected *jñāni*.’

On that occasion he had quoted *Ulladu Nārpadu*, verse 35:

To realise the Self which is always present and to remain as that is [the real] *siddhi*. All other *siddhis* are like those which appear in a dream. Are they real when one awakes? Will those who have got rid of delusion and are established in their true state be deluded again?

## 22

In November 1938 I went out onto the hill with Bhagavan. As

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<sup>19</sup> Bhagavan told these two stories on several occasions. Sometimes when he narrated these events he left his listeners with the impression that the seven women who fed him and the woman who cursed him were spirit beings rather than ordinary mortals. In this particular version the text seems to indicate that the ‘tricky lady’ at the top of the tree vanished into thin air after cursing Bhagavan. It seems unlikely that she could have climbed down the tree and walked away without being observed by either Bhagavan or the two other men.

we were coming back I asked him, 'What must I do to avoid sleep during my meditation?'

Bhagavan replied, 'Meditators must not work too much, nor should they fill their stomachs with excessive food. The more one fills the stomach, the lower one's mental state becomes. If the stomach is mostly empty, one will go higher spiritually. One should not tighten the strings of the *vīṇā*<sup>20</sup> either too much or too little. The body must be kept like that.

'Likewise with sleep. One third of the night has been allotted for sleep. That is, one must go to bed at 10 p.m. and wake up at 2 a.m. One should not sleep during the day time. There is another system also. One should get up whenever one wakes up and one should sleep whenever sleep comes. But one should not think, "I slept" or "I woke up".'

Then he quoted verse 33 of *Dēvikālottara*:

|| The mind often strays into reveries or falls asleep. Be vigilant and turn it into its pristine state again and again.

## 23

Someone once asked Bhagavan about the *rūpa* [form] and *arūpa* [formless] mind.

Bhagavan answered by saying, 'Pure mind has the name *manā-kāśa* [space mind or empty mind]. Immediately on waking from sleep a clarity of awareness [*jñapti*] arises, without exception, in all people. That is the formless mind. Thoughts such as, 'I am the body,' 'This is the world,' arise after that. This is the mind with form. In a cinema show the light appears first. The forms appear on the screen only after that. Likewise, the light of the Self comes first and provides the space for everything that follows.'

Another devotee wanted to know, 'What method should I use to make my mind steady and firm?'

Bhagavan told him, 'It is sufficient to think always of one thing. If the mind does not obey, again start thinking of only one thing. In the course of time the mind will obey your orders.'

A third devotee asked about worldly activities: 'Sometimes there is meditation, at other times there are worldly activities. What is the difference between the two?'

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<sup>20</sup> A large, stringed instrument used in Indian classical music.

Bhagavan answered, 'To be in meditation and to be in activity are both the same. It is like calling the same object by its name in two different languages; like the crow only having one eye but seeing in two different directions;<sup>21</sup> like the elephant using the same trunk for the two activities of breathing and drinking water; like the cobra using its eyes for the two functions of seeing and hearing.'<sup>22</sup>

Then he quoted the following verse [2.173] from *Kaivalya Navanītam*:

If you always remain aware that 'I' am perfect consciousness, what does it matter how much you think, or what you do? All this is unreal, like dream visions after waking. 'I' am all bliss!

The apparent dichotomy between meditation and worldly life prompted me to ask a question of my own.

'Bhagavan,' I asked, 'how is it that one gets the same happiness from worldly activities that one gets from meditation?'

Bhagavan explained that contrasting emotions were all a product of the mind.

'One's happiness and suffering are dependent on one's mental state. Happiness is our natural state. Suffering occurs when one leaves the Self and thinks that the body and the mind are 'I'. What to do about this? The thought 'I am this body' has been strengthened over many births. What remains after it has been destroyed is happiness.'

Bhagavan had not directly answered my question about the different types of happiness but the matter was clarified later when another devotee asked a similar question: 'Bhagavan, the *sāstras* talk about so many different kinds of *ānanda* [happiness or bliss]. Are there really so many different types?'

'No,' replied Bhagavan, '*ānanda* is only one. That *ānanda* is itself God. Our natural state is *ānanda*. Because this is experienced externally through various sensual enjoyments, various names are given to it. However many varieties of happiness are

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<sup>21</sup> It is commonly believed in South India that crows have one large eyeball in the centre of their skulls. Those who believe this say that the eyeball is rotated from side to side so that the crow can use it to see out of either eye socket.

<sup>22</sup> Another common folk belief.

enjoyed, many millions of varieties of misery will also have to be experienced. But this is not so for the *jnāni*. He enjoys all the happiness enjoyed by everyone in the world as his own *Brahmānanda* [bliss of *Brahman*]. *Brahmānanda* is like an ocean. The external types of happiness are like the waves, foam, bubbles and ripples.

‘*Ānanda* is common to all in sleep. All living things and all human beings from a pauper to an emperor experience *ānanda* equally while they are asleep.’

## 24

Question: Swami, as soon as I heard your name I had a great desire to see you. I have now come. How did this great desire come to me?

Bhagavan: In just the same way that your body came to you.

Question: What is the fruit of one’s life?

Bhagavan: If a person thinks that he must conduct himself according to the true principles of life, that itself is the fruit of great *tapas* done in his previous life. Those who do not think in this way are wasting their time.

## 25

One evening, while we were all sitting on the hill, Bhagavan told us about two incidents which had happened at Virupaksha Cave.

‘In my early years here I was once sitting on a rock on the hill when a boy came up to see me. He was about eight years old.

‘Seeing me he said with great pity, “Swami, why did you come away like this to live alone without any clothes?”’<sup>23</sup>

‘I gave him an answer which would satisfy his mind. “The elders in my house became angry with me so I left and came here.”

‘The boy asked, “Swami, what do you do for your food?”’

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<sup>23</sup> Bhagavan at that time would have been wearing nothing more than a loincloth.

‘I replied, “If somebody gives me some, I take it. Otherwise I don’t eat.”

‘The boy was shocked that I had to live such an arduous life.

“‘*Aiyō!*” he exclaimed. “You come with me. I will talk to my boss and get you a job. If you work just for food for a few days he will give you a salary later.” I responded to his offer by remaining silent.<sup>24</sup>

‘On another day, as I was sitting on the bench at Virupaksha Cave, a small boy came up to me and stared at me for a long time. Then he cried and sobbed violently.

‘Palaniswami, who was inside the cave, came out and asked him, “Why are you crying?”

“I feel great pity when I look at him,” said the boy. And then he carried on sobbing.’

Sri Bhagavan, as he often did when he told stories, enlivened his narrative by acting out the parts of the people in the story. In this particular case he gave a good imitation of the boy’s words and sobs.

## 26

Question: The *Purānas* say that *mōksha* means living in Kailash Vaikunta or Brahmaloka [the Hindu heavens] and having *darshan* of God there. Is this correct? Or does *moksha* only come when one merges with *Brahman* in the state where there is no knowledge of the body, the world and the mind?

Bhagavan: Living in Vaikunta and Kailash is not *mōksha*. If everyone goes to Kailash and Vaikunta, where will be space for everyone to live? If I must live and enjoy bliss with God, then God must be *jada* [inert]. If he is *jada*, where can we enjoy bliss?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This incident and the one that follows are reported in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, pp. 10–11. In that version Bhagavan told the boy that he could ask his boss about the possibility of a job. As the boy never returned, Bhagavan continued to be ‘unemployed’.

<sup>25</sup> Some dualistic Hindu sects believe that one must remain separate from God in order to enjoy His bliss. These dualists often cite the fact that the sweetness in sugar can only be experienced if there is someone separate from the sugar to taste it. Bhagavan frequently said that this analogy was inapplicable because God is not an inert (*jada*) object, separate from the experiencing ‘I’.

Then Bhagavan quoted verse thirty-one of *Ulladu Nārpadu* which describes the real state of liberation:

To one who has destroyed himself [his ego] and is awake to his nature as bliss, what remains to be accomplished? He does not see anything [as being] other than himself. Who can comprehend his state?

## 27

Some people came from the south for Bhagavan's *darshan*. Among them was a small boy about five years old. He did *namas-kāram* and then approached Bhagavan and looked at him lovingly. Bhagavan placed his left hand on the boy's head and asked him, 'What do you want?'

The boy replied firmly, 'I don't want anything'.

'Oho!' said Bhagavan, 'You belong to us.'

Then, addressing the people he came with he added, 'If he remains in the "don't want" state everything will come to him'.

This reminded Bhagavan of an old incident from his own life.

'When I was staying at the Pachaiaimman Temple my loincloth got torn. I never made any requests to anybody so I had to stitch it myself. For a needle I used a thorn from a cactus plant. I made a slit at the end which gripped a thread that I had removed from my loincloth. After the repairs were finished I was able to wear it for another two months.

'During the same period my towel had so many holes it looked like a net. One day a shepherd, after seeing this towel, tried to ridicule me by saying, "Swami, the [provincial] Governor wants this towel".

'After washing and drying this towel I used to wrap it around my hand so that no one could see what state it was in. Somehow, those who were with me came to know about it and brought three sets of new loincloths and towels. They took away my old towel and made me exchange my loincloth for a new one.

'If you remain in the "don't want" state, everything will come to you. That is why both likes and dislikes are not wanted.'

## 28

Maurice Frydman: Sometimes when I meditate I enter a state

in which I don't know anything. Is this state *manōlaya* or *manō-nāsa*?<sup>26</sup>

Bhagavan: In both *manōlaya* and *manōnāsa* questions will not arise.

Frydman: What is *manōnāsa*?

Bhagavan: Remaining permanently as one is without the rising of any doubt or thought such as, 'Nothing is known,' or 'Something is known' alone is *manōnāsa*.

## 29

Question: The scriptures say that attention should be placed at the centre between the eyebrows. Is this correct?

Bhagavan: The feeling 'I am' is directly evident to everyone. What happiness is there in seeing any particular God if one ignores this feeling? There is no foolishness like that of thinking that God exists only in certain spots such as the place between the eyebrows. Fixing the attention on these spots is just a violent form of *sādhana* whose aim is to concentrate the mind in order to prevent it from running everywhere. Enquiring 'Who am I?' is a much easier method of controlling the mind.

All the methods of religion are only good at certain levels of development. The *māyā* created by the mind must be destroyed by the mind itself.

Question: What sort of food should a spiritual seeker eat?

Bhagavan: The *niyama* [rule] of taking moderate amounts of sattvic food is better than all other *niyamas*.

Question: Various kinds of *āsanas* [yogic postures] are spoken of in the scriptures. What is the best? Which must be practised?

Bhagavan: *Nididhyāsana* [unwavering meditation or contemplation] is the best. It is enough if one practises this.

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<sup>26</sup> Bhagavan defined *manōlaya* as 'a temporary suspension of all mental faculties' and *manōnāsa* as 'the complete and permanent destruction of the mind'.

## 30

At various times I used to jot down brief answers or statements by Bhagavan which for some reason or another inspired me at the time they were spoken. I usually omitted the question or the context of the answer because at the time I didn't think that they were particularly relevant. The following list contains twelve such items.

(a) The flow of the river stops once it reaches the ocean and becomes one with the ocean. Likewise, if one's mind is always meditating on the Self, eventually it becomes *Ātmamayam* [that is, it will be of the same nature as the Self].

(b) When someone asked Bhagavan how to get rid of anger he answered, 'Become angry with anger. Desire is the root of anger. Desirelessness is absolute happiness.'

(c) The natural name of every person is *mukti*.

(d) He is a real man who does not let go his hold on the Self state while he is attending to whatever problems come of their own accord and without his desire.

(e) He who thinks, 'I am the body' is committing the sin of suicide. He who thinks 'I am the *Ātman*' is a person of very great fortune. A moment of meditation on 'I am the *Ātman*' will destroy all *sanchita karma* just as the sun destroys darkness. How can *karma* remain undestroyed in the one who constantly meditates like this?

(f) When sleep comes, be awake. Sleep when you are awake. This is to sleep without sleeping. To be free from worries is to sleep without sleeping.

(g) Desire is *māyā*. Desirelessness is God.

(h) The man who loves the all-supporting God with the understanding that nothing can be achieved by his own actions, and who expects instead that all actions will be performed by God alone, that man is led every minute by God along the path of truth.

(i) Everyone is seeing himself everywhere. One is in the same state that God and the world are in.

(j) Natural devotion is to know one's Self and to remain permanently in that state without forgetting it.

(k) God is tinier than the atom and larger than the cosmos. All are forms of God. Because of our sense of difference we think that

we are an individual person. There is no mistake greater than this in the world.

(l) One can only think of spoiling others after one has spoiled oneself.

### 31

Question: [Submitted in the form of a written questionnaire.]

(a) Did God create the world in the beginning with as many differences as there are now? Or did these differences only come into being after some time?

(b) If God is common to everyone, why are some people good and some bad? One is lame; another is blind; one person is a *jnāni* while many other people are *ajnānis*. Why did he create all these differences?

(c) Do the *ashta dik pālakas* [the guardian spirits of the eight cardinal points], the thirty-three *crores* of *dēvas* [incarnate spirits] and the *maharishis* [great seers] exist even today?

Bhagavan: [after glancing at the paper] The answer to all these three questions will shine forth of its own accord if you ask yourself, 'To whom did these questions occur?'

After knowing ourselves first, if we then look into the world created by God, we will understand the truth. To try to know God and the world without knowing oneself first is ignorance indeed. The opinions of a man who does not know himself are like those of a man suffering from jaundice who tells other people that the colour of everything is yellow. Who will agree with him?

A small seed contains a big banyan tree, but which came first, the tree or the seed? What can one say in answer to this question?

There is one real answer to such questions: 'If one knows oneself, there is no world.'

Bhagavan then supported this statement by quoting four lines from his own philosophical works.

Is it not ignorance to know all else without knowing the Self which is the source of all knowledge? Can it be knowledge? [*Ulladu Nārpadu*, verse 11, lines 1 and 2]

If one has a form, the world and God will also have forms. [*Ulladu Nārpadu*, verse 4, line 1]

What else is there to know for anyone when Self itself is known? [*Ātma Vidyā Kīrtanam*, verse 3, line 2]

A little later Bhagavan gave a similar answer to another devotee who wanted information about God and creation.

Question: Why did God, who is presumably free from all desires, create the world?

Bhagavan: There will be a place for this question only if this question exists apart from God. Why question about such things? Who is he who questions in the first place? Does this question exist while you are asleep?

‘I am one; God is another.’ Who told you to think like this? Only when we know our own qualifications will we be able to know about God’s. Is this not correct? First find out who *you* are. What the Self is and what God is can be learned later on.

## 32

Question: Because I have too much work to do I keep forgetting to meditate. If I frequently forget like this, when am I going to make any progress?

Bhagavan: Never mind. *Jnāna* will not come in a day. *Samskāras* [mental habits] will only go gradually. Today we may think every four hours, ‘Oh, I have forgotten to meditate’. Tomorrow we may remember every 3½ hours. The day after every three hours. In this way enthusiasm for meditation will slowly come.

Why do you think, ‘Why didn’t I meditate?’ or ‘Why didn’t I work?’ If the thoughts ‘I did’ and ‘I didn’t’ are given up, then all actions will end up as meditation. In that state meditation cannot be given up. This is the state of *sahaja samādhi*.

Question: Have I done *punya* in my previous births?

Bhagavan: If not, how could these thoughts occur?

## 33

The following questions were asked by a lady Congress Party worker called Rameswari Nehru.

Question: What is Bhagavan's opinion about the entry of harijans into temples?<sup>27</sup>

Bhagavan: I have no separate opinion. All things are happening by the power of God. All things which need to be done are done by God at the proper time, in the proper place and in the proper way.

Question: Is it good for one to do social service? Or is it good for one to go into a cave and meditate instead?

Bhagavan: Both are good. But only he who has done service to himself knows how to serve society.

### 34

A woman called Lady Bateman came to the ashram with her friends and retinue and stayed for a few days. She came for *darshan* with her group and asked Bhagavan, 'Just as we do, Bhagavan eats, speaks, applies medicine for toothache, and so on. What then is the difference between us and Bhagavan? I can't see any difference.'

Bhagavan explained the difference between the *jnāni* and the *ajnāni* by giving several analogies.

'Just before going to sleep a small boy started crying and asked his mother, "Mother, I am hungry. Give me some rice." The mother replied, "Please wait a little, the rice is still cooking". The boy fell asleep before the rice was ready. A little later his mother woke him up and showed him the different types of rice that she had prepared: "See, this is dhal rice, this is rasam rice, this is curd rice." The boy was very sleepy but he still managed to eat before he fell asleep again. The next morning, as soon as he woke up, he asked his mother, "Why didn't you give me any rice last night?" All the people in the house knew that he had eaten but the boy himself was not aware of it any more because for him it had just been a sleepy interlude in the middle of the night. The activities of

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<sup>27</sup> Harijans, or outcastes, are Hindus who do not belong to the four major castes. Until the 1930s none of them was allowed to enter or worship in Hindu temples. Nowadays all harijans are legally entitled to enter any Hindu place of worship.

a *jnāni* are in some ways similar to those of the small boy. That is, other people see him taking part in various activities but the *jnāni* himself is not aware that he is doing anything.

‘There are two other similar analogies: one can say that the state of the *jnāni* is like a man listening to a story while his mind is elsewhere, or that he is like the sleeping driver of a bullock cart whose cart continues to move down the road even though he is asleep.

‘Let me give you another example. Two people were sleeping in the same place. One of them had a dream in which both of them suffered while they were wandering through many forests. The other person slept well without dreaming at all. The one who dreamed thought that the one who slept well was also suffering. The dreamer is like the *ajnāni*: he makes a dream world for himself, suffers in that dream, and because he is not able to see that it is only a dream, he believes that all the people in his dream are also suffering. The *jnāni*, on the other hand, does not dream a world at all. He invents no suffering either for himself or for other people. That is because the *jnāni* looks upon everything as *jnāna*, as his own Self, whereas the *ajnāni* only sees *ajnāna* around him.

‘To what the *jnāni* is asleep, to that the *ajnāni* is awake. To what the *ajnāni* is asleep, to that the *jnāni* is awake.

‘Swami Rama Tirtha was once doing *japa* of the name of Siva on top of a high building. A man who was an *ajnāni* came up to him and said, “Jump down from here. Then we can find out whether this word you repeat can save you.”

‘Swami Rama Tirtha asked him, “Where is up and where is down?” For the *jnāni* who sees only *jnāna* such distinctions cannot exist.

‘The *ajnāni* is like the man who only looks at the names and forms that appear on the cinema screen. The *jnāni*, on the other hand, is always aware of the screen on which the names and forms appear.’

### 35

In 1939 two Congress workers came into the hall and began to question Bhagavan.

Question: Can we attain *jnāna* through your grace and teach it to the people of the world?

Bhagavan: First know yourself; leave alone the idea of teaching others. If the world and its people remain after your realisation, you may teach them. Trying to help the world without knowing yourself will be just like a blind man trying to treat the diseases in the eyes of others. First clear your own eyes. If you do this you will see the eyes of all others as your own. Then, if you see the eyes of all others as your own, how can you exist without helping them?

Question: After reading the *mahāvākya* '*aham brahmāsmi*'<sup>28</sup> from the *Vēdānta Sāstras* [the *Upanishads*] any number of times, why is one unable to attain *jnāna*?

Bhagavan: Knowledge of the Self is not in the *Vēdānta Sāstras*. Knowledge of the Self can only be obtained by studying oneself.

Question: How is one to study oneself?

Bhagavan: You can study it only if there are two selves [one which studies and the other which is studied]. To remain as the Self is to study the Self. If you study the *Vēdas* and the *sāstras* you may get due respect in the world. Society will then decorate your neck with garlands, read you complimentary letters, give you good food, a great name and much money. But all these things will be great obstacles for *jnāna* and *sāadhanā*.

Question: However hard we try, the suffering due to *samsāra* does not go away.

Bhagavan: If we see who is having the *samsāra* the suffering will go.

Question: It is said that one can attain the Self by means of Patanjali's yoga. Is this true?

Bhagavan: Yoga means the union of two existing things. Would you agree that there are two 'I's'?

Question: No.

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<sup>28</sup> *Aham brahmāsmi* means 'I am Brahman'. There are four *mahāvākyas*, or 'great sayings' in the *Upanishads* (called here the *Vēdānta Sāstras*) which affirm the reality of the Self, or *Brahman*. Traditional practitioners of advaitic *sāadhanā* repeat one or more of the *mahāvākyas* until they gain the unwavering conviction, or better still the experience, that the Self alone exists.

Bhagavan: Where is one to attain knowledge of the Self? Since we ourselves are already the Self, suffering arises only when we think, 'I am the body' or, 'There is a Self which I have to attain'. The Self is not something that is a long way away. We need not search for it by travelling on planes or trains. To do this will be like a man who is immersed in water crying out, 'I am thirsty! I am thirsty!' If we want to attain the Self while already being the Self, how is it possible?

Question: Please tell us a method to destroy the mind.

Bhagavan: Find out who has the mind. If the mind is still there after you succeed, you may then look for a method to destroy it.

Question: I have a mind.

Bhagavan: Who are you? Are you this body? Why do you not raise questions like this while you are asleep? Do you agree that the mind and the *prāna* [the life force which animates the body] are not yourself?

Question: No.

Bhagavan: You are the Self. If there is anything separate from you, you can think about doing good or bad things to it. But if you yourself are the only thing that exists, how can there be any likes or dislikes? Desirelessness is absolute bliss.

Question: We are asking you again because of our ignorance. We pray to Sri Bhagavan to forgive us and give us a reply. It is said that one must do spiritual practice [*abhyāsa*] to get rid of the mind. How should this be done?

Bhagavan: Enquiring with the mind, 'Whose is the mind that ought to be destroyed?' is the *abhyāsa* to get rid of the mind.

Question: Who am I? I do not know.

Bhagavan: Without even knowing who we are we want to attain something else. That which we want to attain is that which we already are. The experience of any state or heavenly world that comes to us will eventually go away again. That which comes and goes is not the Self. That which is always within the experience of everyone, that alone is our real Self. That is *mōksha*.

Question: What benefit can the Guru give to the disciple?

Bhagavan: Guru and God can only indicate the path by saying, 'You are That'. Nothing else can be done. Walking along the path is the work of the disciple.

Question: I want to know myself. You must tell me the way.

Bhagavan: Do you agree that you have two 'I's?

Question: That is what I do not know anything about. What should I do to make the mind calm down?

Bhagavan: It is sufficient to go on observing the place from where the mind arises.

36

Once, while I was walking on the hill with Bhagavan, I asked him for a boon: 'Bhagavan, I do not want anything else in the world except for the boon of not getting the I-am-the-body idea.'

Nodding his head gently, Bhagavan graciously replied, 'All great people have toiled only for that. You are also That.'

# Conversations

*Although Annamalai Swami likes to lead a reclusive life, he generally welcomes visitors who want to talk about Bhagavan and his teachings. For about nine months in 1986 an American sannyāsin called Satya recorded and transcribed many of his conversations. This final chapter contains edited highlights of the exchanges that took place during this period. The questioners were all foreigners and most of them had come to Annamalai Swami for advice on how to meditate properly. Annamalai Swami responded by giving them an elegant and forceful summary of Bhagavan's teachings on spiritual practice.*

*Each of the numbered talks that follows contains the teachings that were given on a particular day during this period. I have not been able to identify the questioners, but I should point out that on several days more than one person was asking questions. This accounts for some of the abrupt changes of subject matter and some of the apparent contradictions in the attitudes, practices and experiences of the questioners.*

*In order to defend Annamalai Swami's privacy I should point out that he does not encourage people to come and talk to him. He is not interested in seeing casual visitors, nor is he interested in debating the merits of different philosophies. He doesn't even like people who come merely to sit and meditate with him. If such people come he generally tells them to go and meditate in the old hall. Potential visitors should note that they will only be welcome if they come with serious questions about Bhagavan, his teachings, or their own spiritual practices.*

## 1

*Question: What is the easiest way to be free of the 'little self'?*

*Annamalai Swami: Stop identifying with it. If you can convince yourself 'This "little self" is not really me,' it will just disappear.*

*Q: But how to do this?*

*AS: The 'little self' is something which only appears to be real. If*

you understand that it has no real existence it will disappear, leaving behind it the experience of the real and only Self. Understand that it has no real existence and it will stop troubling you.

Consciousness is universal. There is no limitation or 'little self' in it. It is only when we identify with and limit ourselves to the body and the mind that this false self is born. If, through enquiry, you go to the source of this 'little self', you find that it dissolves into nothingness.

*Q: But I am very accustomed to feel 'I am this "little self"'. I cannot break this habit merely by thinking 'I am not this "little self"'.*

AS: This 'little self' will only give way to the real Self if you meditate constantly. You cannot wish it away with a few stray thoughts. Try to remember the analogy of the rope which looks like a snake in the twilight. If you see the rope as a snake, the real nature of the rope is hidden from you. If you only see the rope, the snake is not there. Not only that, you know that there never was a snake there. When you have that clear and correct perception that the snake never at any time existed, the question of how to kill the snake disappears. Apply this analogy to the 'little self' that you are worrying about. If you can understand that this 'little self' never at any time had any existence outside your imagination, you will not be concerned about ways and means of getting rid of it.

*Q: It is all very clear but I feel that I need some help. I am not sure that I can generate this understanding by myself.*

AS: The desire for assistance is part of your problem. Don't make the mistake of imagining that there is some goal to be reached or attained. If you think like this you will start looking for methods to practise and people to help you. This just perpetuates the problem you are trying to end. Instead, cultivate the strong awareness, 'I am the Self. I am That. I am *Brahman*. I am everything.' You don't need any methods to get rid of the wrong ideas you have about yourself. All you have to do is stop believing them. The best way to do this is to replace them with ideas which more accurately reflect the real state of affairs. If you think and meditate 'I am the Self,' it will do you a lot more good than thinking, 'I am the "little self"'. How can I get rid of this "little self"?'

The Self is always attained, it is always realised; it is not something that you have to seek, reach or discover. Your *vāsanās* [mental habits and tendencies] and all the wrong ideas you have about yourself are blocking and hiding the experience of the real Self. If you don't identify with the wrong ideas, your Self-nature will not be hidden from you.

You said that you needed help. If your desire to gain a proper understanding of your real nature is intense enough, help will automatically come. If you want to generate an awareness of your real nature you will be immeasurably helped by having contact with a *jñāni*. The power and grace which a *jñāni* radiates quieten the mind and automatically eliminate the wrong ideas you have about yourself. You can make progress by having *satsang* of a realised Guru and by constant spiritual practice. The Guru cannot do everything for you. If you want to give up the limiting habits of many lifetimes, you must practise constantly.

Most people take the appearance of the snake in the rope to be reality. Acting on their misperceptions they think up many different ways of killing the snake. They can never succeed in getting rid of the snake until they give up the idea that there is a snake there at all. People who want to kill or control the mind have the same problem: they imagine that there is a mind which needs to be controlled and take drastic steps to beat it into submission. If, instead, they generated the understanding that there is no such thing as mind, all their problems would come to an end. You must generate the conviction, 'I am the all-pervasive consciousness in which all bodies and minds in the world are appearing and disappearing. I am that consciousness which remains unchanged and unaffected by these appearances and disappearances.' Stabilise yourself in that conviction. That is all you need to do.

Bhagavan once told a story about a man who wanted to bury his own shadow in a deep pit. He dug the pit and stood in such a position that his shadow was on the bottom of it. The man then tried to bury it by covering it with earth. Each time he threw some soil in the hole the shadow appeared on top of it. Of course, he never succeeded in burying the shadow. Many people behave like this when they meditate. They take the mind to be real, try to fight it and kill it, and always fail. **These fights against the mind are all mental activities which strengthen the mind instead of weakening**

it. If you want to get rid of the mind, all you have to do is understand that it is 'not me'. Cultivate the awareness 'I am the immanent consciousness'. When that understanding becomes firm, the non-existent mind will not trouble you.

*Q: I don't think that repeating 'I am not the mind, I am consciousness' will ever convince me that I am not the mind. It will just be another thought going on within the mind. If I could experience, even for a moment, what it is like to be without the mind, the conviction would automatically come. I think that one second of experiencing consciousness as it really is would be more convincing than several years of mental repetitions.*

AS: Every time you go to sleep you have the experience of being without a mind. You cannot deny that you exist while you are asleep and you cannot deny that your mind is not functioning while you are in dreamless sleep. This daily experience should convince you that it is possible to continue your existence without a mind. Of course, you do not have the full experience of consciousness while you are asleep, but if you think about what happens during this state you should come to understand that your existence, the continuity of your being, is in no way dependent on your mind or your identification with it. When the mind reappears every morning you instantly jump to the conclusion 'This is the real me'. If you reflect on this proposition for some time you will see how absurd it is. If what you really are only exists when the mind is present, you have to accept that you didn't exist while you were asleep. No one will accept such an absurd conclusion. If you analyse your alternating states you will discover that it is your direct experience that you exist whether you are awake or asleep. You will also discover that the mind only becomes active while you are waking or dreaming. From these simple daily experiences it should be easy to understand that the mind is something that comes and goes. Your existence is not wiped out each time the mind ceases to function. I am not telling you some philosophical theory; I am telling you something that you can validate by direct experience in any twenty-four hour period of your life.

Take these facts, which you can discover by directly experiencing them, and investigate them a little more. When the mind appears every morning don't jump to the usual conclusion, 'This is me; these thoughts are mine'. Instead, watch these thoughts come

and go without identifying with them in any way. If you can resist the impulse to claim each and every thought as your own, you will come to a startling conclusion: you will discover that you are the consciousness in which the thoughts appear and disappear. You will discover that this thing called mind only exists when thoughts are allowed to run free. Like the snake which appears in the rope, you will discover that the mind is only an illusion which appears through ignorance or misperception.

You want some experience which will convince you that what I am saying is true. You can have that experience if you give up your life-long habit of inventing an 'I' which claims all thoughts as 'mine'. Be conscious of yourself as consciousness alone, watch all the thoughts come and go. Come to the conclusion, by direct experience, that you are really consciousness itself, not its ephemeral contents.

Clouds come and go in the sky but the appearance and disappearance of the clouds doesn't affect the sky. Your real nature is like the sky, like space. Just remain like the sky and let thought-clouds come and go. If you cultivate this attitude of indifference towards the mind, gradually you will cease to identify yourself with it.

## 2

*Q: When I began to do sādhanā everything went smoothly at first. There was a lot of peace and happiness and jñāna seemed very near. But nowadays there is hardly any peace, just mental obstacles and hindrances.*

AS: Whenever obstacles come on the path, think of them as 'not me'. Cultivate the attitude that the real you is beyond the reach of all troubles and obstacles. There are no obstacles for the Self. If you can remember that you always are the Self, obstacles will be of no importance.

One of the *ālvārs* [a group of Vaishnavite saints] once remarked that if one is not doing any spiritual practice one is not aware of any mind problems. He said that it is only when one starts to do meditation that one becomes aware of the different ways that the mind causes us trouble. This is very true. But one should not worry about any of the obstacles or fear them. One should merely

regard them as being 'not me'. They can only cause you trouble while you think that they are your problems.

The obstructing *vāsanās* [mental habits and tendencies] may look like a large mountain which obstructs your progress. Don't be intimidated by the size. It is not a mountain of rock, it is a mountain of camphor. If you light one corner of it with the flame of discriminative attention, it will all burn to nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Stand back from the mountain of problems, refuse to acknowledge that they are yours, and they will dissolve and disappear before your eyes.

Don't be deluded by your thoughts and *vāsanās*. They are always trying to trick you into believing that you are a real person, that the world is real, and that all your problems are real. Don't fight them; just ignore them. Don't accept delivery of all the wrong ideas that keep coming to you. Establish yourself in the conviction that you are the Self and that nothing can stick to you or affect you. Once you have that conviction you will find that you automatically ignore the habits of the mind. When the rejection of mental activities becomes continuous and automatic, you will begin to have the experience of the Self.

If you see two strangers quarrelling in the distance you do not give much attention to them because you know that the dispute is none of your business. Treat the contents of your mind in the same way. Instead of filling your mind with thoughts and then organising fights between them, pay no attention to the mind at all. Rest quietly in the feeling of 'I am', which is consciousness, and cultivate the attitude that all thoughts, all perceptions are 'not me'. When you have learned to regard your mind as a distant stranger, you will not pay any attention to all the obstacles it keeps inventing for you.

Mental problems feed on the attention that you give them. The more you worry about them, the stronger they become. If you ignore them, they lose their power and finally vanish.

*Q: I am always thinking and believing that there is only the Self but somehow there is still a feeling that I want or need something more.*

*AS: Who is it that wants? If you can find the answer to that question there will be no one to want anything.*

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<sup>1</sup> Camphor is a highly combustible solid which can be easily lit with a lighted match. When burnt it leaves no ashes behind. Once it is alight it will burn continuously until nothing is left except a small black stain.

*Q: Children are born without egos. As they begin to grow up, how do their egos arise and cover the Self?*

AS: A young child may appear to have no ego but its ego and all the latent *vāsanās* that go with it are there in seed form. As the child's body grows bigger, the ego also grows bigger. The ego is produced by the power of *māyā* [illusion], which is one of the *saktis* [powers] of the Self.

*Q: How does māyā operate? How does it originate? Since nothing exists except the Self, how does the Self manage to conceal its own nature from itself?*

AS: The Self, which is infinite power and the source of all power, is indivisible. Yet within this indivisible Self there are five *saktis* or powers, with varying functions, which operate simultaneously. The five *saktis* are creation, preservation, destruction, veiling (which is the *māyā sakti*) and grace. The fifth *sakti*, grace, counteracts and removes the fourth *sakti*, which is *māyā*.

When *māyā* is totally inactive, that is, when the identity with the body and the mind has been dropped, there is an awareness of consciousness, of being. When one is established in that state there is no body, no mind and no world. These three things are just ideas which are brought into an apparent existence when *māyā* is present and active.

When *māyā* is active, the sole effective way to dissolve it is the path shown by Bhagavan: one must do self-enquiry and discriminate between what is real and what is unreal. It is the power of *māyā* which makes us believe in the reality of things which have no reality outside our imagination. If you ask, 'What are these imaginary things?' the answer is, 'Everything that is not the formless Self'. The Self alone is real; everything else is a figment of our imagination.

It is not helpful to enquire why there is *māyā* and how it operates. If you are in a boat which is leaking, you don't waste time asking whether the hole was made by an Italian, a Frenchman or an Indian. You just plug the leak. Don't worry about where *māyā* comes from. Put all your energy into escaping from its effects. If you try to investigate the origin of *māyā* with your mind you are doomed to fail because any answer you come up with will be a *māyā* answer. If you want to understand how *māyā* operates and originates you should establish yourself in the Self, the one place where you can be free of it, and then watch how it takes you over each time you fail to keep your attention there.

*Q: You say that māyā is one of the saktis. What exactly do you mean by sakti?*

AS: *Sakti* is energy or power. It is a name for the dynamic aspect of the Self. *Sakti* and *sānti* [peace] are two aspects of the same consciousness. If you want to separate them at all, you can say that *sānti* is the unmanifest aspect of the Self while *sakti* is the manifest. But really they are not separate. A flame has two properties: light and heat. The two cannot be separated.

*Sānti* and *sakti* are like the sea and its waves. *Sānti*, the unmanifest aspect, is the vast unmoving body of water. The waves that appear and move on the surface are *sakti*. *Sānti* is motionless, vast and all-encompassing, whereas waves are active.

Bhagavan used to say that after realisation the *jīvanmukta* experiences *sānti* within and is established permanently in that *sānti*. In that state of realisation he sees that all activities are caused by *sakti*. After realisation one is aware that there are no individual people doing anything. Instead there is an awareness that all activities are the *sakti* of the one Self. The *jñāni*, who is fully established in the *sānti*, is always aware that *sakti* is not separate from him. In that awareness everything is his Self and all actions are his. Alternatively, it is equally correct to say that he never does anything. This is one of the paradoxes of the Self.

The universe is controlled by the one *sakti*, sometimes called *Paramēswara sakti* [the power of the Supreme Lord]. This moves and orders all things. Natural laws, such as the laws that keep the planets in their orbits, are all manifestations of this *sakti*.

*Q: You say that everything is the Self, even māyā. If this is so, why can't I see the Self clearly? Why is it hidden from me?*

AS: Because you are looking in the wrong direction. You have the idea that the Self is something that you see or experience. This is not so. The Self is the awareness or the consciousness in which the seeing and the experiencing take place.

Even if you don't see the Self, the Self is still there. Bhagavan sometimes remarked humorously: 'People just open a newspaper and glance through it. Then they say, "I have seen the paper". But really they haven't seen the paper, they have only seen the letters and pictures that are on it. There can be no words or pictures without the paper, but people always forget the paper while they are reading the words.'

Bhagavan would then use this analogy to show that while people see the names and forms that appear on the screen of consciousness, they ignore the screen itself. With this kind of partial vision it is easy to come to the conclusion that all forms are unconnected with each other and separate from the person who sees them. If people were to be aware of the consciousness instead of the forms that appear in it, they would realise that all forms are just appearances which manifest within the one indivisible consciousness.

That consciousness is the Self that you are looking for. You can be that consciousness but you can never see it because it is not something that is separate from you.

### 3

*Q: You talk a lot about vāsanās. Could you please tell me exactly what they are and how they function?*

AS: *Vāsanās* are habits of the mind. They are the mistaken identifications and the repeated thought patterns that occur again and again. It is the *vāsanās* which cover up the experience of the Self. *Vāsanās* arise, catch your attention, and pull you outwards towards the world rather than inwards towards the Self. This happens so often and so continuously that the mind never gets a chance to rest or to understand its real nature.

Cocks like to claw the ground. It is a perpetual habit with them. Even if they are standing on bare rock they still try to scratch the ground.

*Vāsanās* function in much the same way. They are habits and patterns of thought that appear again and again even if they are not wanted. Most of our ideas and thoughts are incorrect. When they rise habitually as *vāsanās* they brainwash us into thinking that they are true. The fundamental *vāsanās* such as 'I am the body' or 'I am the mind' have appeared in us so many times that we automatically accept that they are true. Even our desire to transcend our *vāsanās* is a *vāsanā*. When we think 'I must meditate' or 'I must make an effort' we are just organising a fight between two different *vāsanās*. You can only escape the habits of the mind by abiding in consciousness as consciousness. Be who you are. Be as you are. Just be still. Ignore all the *vāsanās* that rise in the mind and instead fix your attention in the Self.

*Q: Bhagavan often told devotees to 'Be still'. Did he mean 'Be mentally still'?*

AS: Bhagavan's famous instruction '*summā iru*' [be still] is often misunderstood. It does not mean that you should be physically still; it means that you should always abide in the Self. If there is too much physical stillness, *tamōguna* [a state of mental torpor] arises and predominates. In that state you will feel very sleepy and mentally dull. *Rajōguna* [a state of excessive mental activity], on the other hand, produces emotions and a mind which is restless. In *sattva guna* [a state of mental quietness and clarity] there is stillness and harmony. If mental activity is necessary while one is in *sattva guna* it takes place. But for the rest of the time there is stillness. When *tamōguna* and *rajōguna* predominate, the Self cannot be felt. If *sattva guna* predominates one experiences peace, bliss, clarity and an absence of wandering thoughts. That is the stillness that Bhagavan was prescribing.

*Q: Bhagavan, in Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, speaks of bhōga vāsanās [vāsanās which are for enjoyment] and bandha vāsanās [vāsanās which produce bondage]. He says that for the jñāni there are bhōga vāsanās but no bandha vāsanās. Would Swamiji please clarify the difference.*

AS: Nothing can cause bondage for the *jñāni* because his mind is dead. In the absence of a mind he knows himself only as consciousness. Because the mind is dead, he is no longer able to identify himself with the body. But even though he knows that he is not the body, it is a fact that the body is still alive. That body will continue to live, and the *jñāni* will continue to be aware of it, until its own *karma* is exhausted. Because the *jñāni* is still aware of the body, he will also be aware of the thoughts and *vāsanās* that arise in that body. None of these *vāsanās* has the power to cause bondage for him because he never identifies with them, but they do have the power to make the body behave in certain ways. The body of the *jñāni* enjoys and experiences these *vāsanās* although the *jñāni* himself is not affected by them. That is why it is sometimes said that for the *jñāni* there are *bhōga vāsanās* but no *bandha vāsanās*.

The *bhōga vāsanās* differ from *jñāni* to *jñāni*. Some *jñānis* may accumulate wealth, some may sit in silence; some may study the *sāstras* [scriptures] while others may remain illiterate; some may

get married and raise families, but others may become celibate monks. It is the *bhōga vāsanās* which determine the kind of lifestyle a *jnāni* will lead. The *jnāni* is aware of the consequences of all these *vāsanās* without ever identifying with them. Because of this he never falls back into *samsāra* again.

The *vāsanās* arise because of the habits and practices of previous lifetimes. That is why they differ from *jnāni* to *jnāni*. When *vāsanās* rise in ordinary people who still identify with the body and the mind, they cause likes and dislikes. Some *vāsanās* are embraced wholeheartedly while others are rejected as being undesirable. These likes and dislikes generate desires and fears which in turn produce more *karma*. While you are still making judgements about what is good and what is bad, you are identifying with the mind and making new *karma* for yourself. When new *karma* has been created like this, it means that you have to take another birth to enjoy it.

The *jnāni*'s body carries out all the acts which are destined for it. But because the *jnāni* makes no judgement about what is good or bad, and because he has no likes and dislikes, he is not creating any new *karma* for himself. Because he knows that he is not the body, he can witness all its activities without getting involved in them in any way.

There will be no rebirth for the *jnāni* because once the mind has been destroyed there is no possibility of any new *karma* being created.

*Q: So whatever happens to us in life only happens because of our past likes and dislikes?*

AS: Yes.

*Q: How can one learn not to react when vāsanās arise in the mind? Is there anything special that we should be looking out for?*

AS: You must learn to recognise them when they arise. That is the only way. If you can catch them early enough and frequently enough they will not cause you much trouble. If you want to pay attention to a special area of danger, watch how the five senses operate. It is the nature of the mind to seek stimulation through the five senses. The mind catches hold of sense impressions and processes them in such a way that they produce long chains of uncontrolled thoughts. Learn to watch how your senses behave.

Learn to watch how the mind reacts to sense impressions. If you can stop the mind from reacting to sense impressions you can eliminate a large number of your *vāsanās*.

*Q: In order to have realised the Self, jñānis must have done a lot of punyas and tapas in their previous lives. If jñānis experience the fruits of all their previous punyas in their last life, they all ought to have very enjoyable last lives. This does not appear to be the case. Many of them get very sick. They often have to put up with a lot of body problems.*

AS: There are several reasons for this. Sometimes Self-realisation makes the body very weak. Bhagavan's body used to shake a lot. When he was asked about this he would sometimes say, 'If an elephant enters a weak hut, what will happen to the hut?' The elephant was Self-realisation and the weak hut was his body.

Some *jñānis* take on the *karma* of some of their disciples and experience it themselves in the form of sickness. In such cases, the sickness cannot be attributed to anything that happened in the *jñāni's* previous lives.

Most *jñānis* have got rid of most of their *karma*, both good and bad, before they even start on their last life. They have all done *tapas* in their previous lives. By the time their last life starts they often have very little *karma* left. Only a few, like Vidyaranya Swami, have a lot of *punyas* left to enjoy.

Vidyaranya Swami lived several centuries ago. In one lifetime, when he was very poor and hungry, one of his gurus initiated him and told him to do *upāsanā* [meditation] on the Goddess Lakshmi [the goddess of wealth]. He did that *upāsanā* for years, hoping to get rich, but no wealth came to him in that lifetime.

In one of his subsequent births he received initiation from a *jñāni*, did a lot of meditation and finally realised the Self. After realisation he was established in a state of total desirelessness. It was only after his realisation that his previous *upāsanā* on Lakshmi started to bear fruit.

Some time after his realisation gold started to fall from the sky into the city where he was living. Vidyaranya Swami realised that this was happening because of his previous meditations, but because he no longer had any desires, he no longer had any interest in accumulating money or gold. He told the king that the golden rain was falling on account of his previous *tapas*. He also

made it clear that he didn't want any of gold for himself. The king announced that the people in the city could keep any gold which had fallen on their own property. He reserved the gold which had fallen on public property for his own use. The king later used his own share of the gold to build new temples and tanks.

The king took the gold which had fallen on the streets and made gold bricks out of it. In order to test whether Vidyaranya Swami was really desireless, the king put some of these bricks outside Vidyaranya Swami's house. Then he and his wife secretly watched to see what he would do with them. Vidyaranya Swami eventually came out of his house, saw the bricks and squatted on them while he defecated. Because he no longer had any interest in money, that was the only useful thing he could do with them.

*Q: People are still using gold bricks to make toilets even today. The toilet seat in the private plane of the Shah of Iran was made out of solid gold. The Shah left this plane behind when he had to flee the country. When the people from the new government inspected the plane they found this gold seat.*

AS: Visitors were always trying to make Bhagavan use luxurious things but he never had any desire for them. One lady once brought a velvet blanket for him to sit on, but he refused to accept it.

The woman started to plead with Bhagavan: 'Please Bhagavan, take my blanket and sit on it.'

No one could make her keep quiet. After about four hours of begging and pleading Bhagavan accepted the gift just to keep her quiet. He sat on the blanket for about half an hour and then sent it to Chinnaswami to store. He never used it again.

Someone else brought him some sandals made out of solid silver and a silver banana leaf for him to eat off. Bhagavan used the leaf for one meal, just to please the devotee, and then he gave both the leaf and the sandals to the temple. He never even bothered to try the sandals on. The ashram had a room which contained all the presents which people had given to Bhagavan. Bhagavan never used any of them. I was told that shortly after Bhagavan died Chinnaswami gave nearly all of these presents away to devotees.

When Bhagavan was asked by an advocate in the Perumal Swami case, 'Do you have any desire for money?' Bhagavan answered, 'I neither like it nor dislike it'.

Bhagavan never liked or disliked anything. If we have likes or dislikes, if we hate or love someone or something, some bondage will arise in the mind. *Jnānis* never like or dislike anything. That is why they are free of all bondage.

## 4

*Q: How am I to know if I am making any progress in my meditation?*

AS: Those who meditate a lot often develop a subtle form of ego. They become pleased with the idea that they are making some progress; they become pleased with the states of peace and bliss that they enjoy; they become pleased that they have learned to exercise some control over their wayward minds; or they may derive some satisfaction from the fact that they have found a good Guru or a good method of meditation. All these feelings are ego feelings. When ego feelings are present, awareness of the Self is absent. The thought 'I am meditating' is an ego thought. If real meditation is taking place, this thought cannot arise.

Don't worry about whether you are making progress or not. Just keep your attention on the Self twenty-four hours a day. Meditation is not something that should be done in a particular position at a particular time. It is an awareness and an attitude that must persist throughout the day. To be effective, meditation must be continuous.

If you want to water a field you dig a channel to the field and send water continuously along it for a lengthy period of time. If you send water for only ten seconds and then stop, the water sinks into the ground even before it reaches the field. You will not be able to reach the Self and stay there without a prolonged, continuous effort. Each time you give up trying, or get distracted, some of your previous effort goes to waste.

Continuous inhalation and exhalation are necessary for the continuance of life. Continuous meditation is necessary for all those who want to stay in the Self.

You divide your life up into different activities: 'I am eating,' 'I am meditating,' 'I am working,' etc. If you have ideas like these you are still identifying with the body. Get rid of all these ideas and replace them with the single thought 'I am the Self'. Hold on

to that idea and don't let go. Don't give these I-am-the-body ideas any attention.

'I must eat now'; 'I will go to sleep now'; 'I will have a bath now': all thoughts like these are I-am-the-body thoughts. Learn to recognise them when they arise and learn to ignore them or deny them. Stay firmly in the Self and don't allow the mind to identify with anything that the body does.

*Q: What is the correct way to pursue self-enquiry?*

AS: Bhagavan has said: 'When thoughts arise stop them from developing by enquiring, "To whom is this thought coming?" as soon as the thought appears. What does it matter if many thoughts keep coming up? Enquire into their origin or find out who has the thoughts and sooner or later the flow of thoughts will stop.'<sup>2</sup>

This is how self-enquiry should be practised.

When Bhagavan spoke like this he sometimes used the analogy of a besieged fort. If one systematically closes off all the entrances to such a fort and then picks off the occupants one by one as they try to come out, sooner or later the fort will be empty. Bhagavan said that we should apply these same tactics to the mind. How to go about doing this? Seal off the entrances and exits to the mind by not reacting to rising thoughts or sense impressions. Don't let new ideas, judgements, likes, dislikes, etc. enter the mind, and don't let rising thoughts flourish and escape your attention. When you have sealed off the mind in this way, challenge each emerging thought as it appears by asking, 'Where have you come from?' or 'Who is the person who is having this thought?' If you can do this continuously, with full attention, new thoughts will appear momentarily and then disappear. If you can maintain the siege for long enough, a time will come when no more thoughts arise; or if they do, they will only be fleeting, undistracting images on the periphery of consciousness. In that thought-free state you will begin to experience yourself as consciousness, not as mind or body.

However, if you relax your vigilance even for a few seconds

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<sup>2</sup> This is a paraphrase of Bhagavan's own instructions which he gave in *Who am I?* The analogy of the besieged fort which appears in the next paragraph is also taken from *Who am I?* but Annamalai Swami expounds on this analogy in far greater detail than Bhagavan did.

and allow new thoughts to escape and develop unchallenged, the siege will be lifted and the mind will regain some or all of its former strength.

In a real fort the occupants need a continuous supply of food and water to hold out during a siege. When the supplies run out, the occupants must surrender or die. In the fort of the mind the occupants, which are thoughts, need a thinker to pay attention to them and indulge in them. If the thinker withholds his attention from rising thoughts or challenges them before they have a chance to develop, the thoughts will all die of starvation. You challenge them by repeatedly asking yourself 'Who am I? Who is the person who is having these thoughts?' If the challenge is to be effective you must make it before the rising thought has had a chance to develop into a stream of thoughts.

Mind is only a collection of thoughts and the thinker who thinks them. The thinker is the 'I'-thought, the primal thought which rises from the Self before all others, which identifies with all other thoughts and says, 'I am this body'. When you have eradicated all thoughts except for the thinker himself by ceaseless enquiry or by refusing to give them any attention, the 'I'-thought sinks into the Heart and surrenders, leaving behind it only an awareness of consciousness. This surrender will only take place when the 'I'-thought has ceased to identify with rising thoughts. While there are still stray thoughts which attract or evade your attention, the 'I'-thought will always be directing its attention outwards rather than inwards. The purpose of self-enquiry is to make the 'I'-thought move inwards, towards the Self. This will happen automatically as soon as you cease to be interested in any of your rising thoughts.

*Q: Many people find self-enquiry very difficult. Even most of Bhagavan's devotees seem to follow a bhakti path. If one cannot do enquiry successfully, should one first purify the mind with japa?*

AS: No. If you have some interest in the path of self-enquiry you should follow it even if you feel that you are not very good at it. If you want to do self-enquiry effectively and properly you should stick to that method alone. Other methods may be good in their own right but they are not good as preparations for self-enquiry. If you are serious about becoming a good violin player, you take lessons from a good teacher and practise as much as you can. If

you encounter some difficulties you don't switch to the clarinet for a few months, you stay with your chosen instrument and keep practising till you get it right. The best preparation for self-enquiry is self-enquiry.

*Q: I have had some Tibetan initiations. I have been given various mantras and rituals to do. Should I pursue them?*

AS: The best *mantra* is 'I am the Self; everything is my Self; everything is one'. If you keep this in your mind all the time the Self will eventually reveal itself to you.

Don't be satisfied with rituals and other kindergarten techniques. If you are serious, head directly for the Self. Hold onto it as tenaciously as you can and don't let anything or anyone loosen your grip.

*Q: The mind is always flowing like an unstoppable river. Most of the time I am not even capable of reaching the Self. How can I hold onto something that I can't even get near?*

AS: When it rises, the mind automatically goes out to the world. If you do self-enquiry you can train it to flow towards the Self. In deep sleep the mind automatically goes to the Self, but you are not aware of it. Through the steady practice of self-enquiry the mind can be trained in such a way that it automatically flows towards the Self in the waking and dream states. It is very difficult at first, but with practice it can be done. Repeated self-enquiry makes the mind go back into the Self. Other methods may produce good experiences but the good experiences will not make the mind go back into the Self and stay there.

*Q: How much meditation is good? How many hours a day?*

AS: Meditation must be continuous. The current of meditation must be present in all your activities. With practice, meditation and work can go on simultaneously.

*Q: I do japa. I was initiated by a Bengali saint. I do it as Bhagavan suggests. I try to trace the source of the sound.*

AS: Your practice will be more effective if you try to find out who is doing the *japa*.

*Q: Can desires be eradicated by meditation or must they be fulfilled before they finally subside?*

AS: All desires are of the ego and the ego is dissolved by steadily abiding in the Self. If you succumb to your desires, you identify with your ego. If you put the mind in the Self and keep it there, you identify with the Self. If the mind is firmly rooted in the Self, most desires will not arise. The few that do will not trouble you in any way because there will be no impulse to act on them.

*Q: Is it good to devote some time to staying healthy? Should we do hatha yoga, for example, to keep the body in good condition?*

AS: It is difficult to do *sādhana* if the body is not in good condition. *Hatha* yoga is one way of staying healthy. Bhagavan used to say, however, that out of all the different *āsanas*, *nididhyāsana* is the best. He would then add that *nididhyāsana* means abidance in the Self.

Don't pay too much attention to the body. If you worry about the well-being of your body, you identify with it more and more. Look on it as a useful vehicle: maintain it, fuel it properly and repair it if it breaks down, but don't become attached to it. If you can keep your attention on the Self without being distracted by unpleasant bodily sensations, you are healthy enough to do *sādhana*. If you do your meditation earnestly and continuously you will begin to find that health problems will not distract you. When your abidance in the Self is firm and strong, you cease to be aware of the body and its pains.

## 5

AS: Bhagavan once said, 'To correct oneself is to correct the whole world'. When one has corrected oneself completely one finds that there is no one other than oneself to correct. One becomes quiet and peaceful within and one spontaneously radiates happiness to all beings.

If a powerful light is shining it need not say to the darkness 'Please go away'. In the presence of such a powerful light all darkness immediately vanishes. Similarly, the *jñāni* spontaneously radiates a spiritual light which automatically dispels the darkness of spiritual ignorance.

*Q: Why did God make this world so imperfectly? What is the purpose of a world in which everyone is continually suffering? Why is there darkness for the jñāni to dispel?*

AS: The ultimate purpose of life is to enquire about the nature of the Self and to stabilise firmly there.

Of all births this human birth is the most precious because in this birth we have been given the faculty of enquiry. Through this faculty we are able to enquire about the true nature of the Self. This precious birth is not given to us to be wasted in sensual pleasures. It is given to us only to know our true Self.

Saint Tayumanavar sang in one verse:

I came to this world just to realise myself but I forgot the purpose for which I came. My mind became deluded by accumulating riches and by indulging in sensual pleasures. I was deluded, lost in this *māyā*, searching for the transient pleasures of wealth and women. To kill this delusion my Guru gave me the beautiful sword of *jnāna*.<sup>3</sup>

*Q: How long should we stay with the Guru?*

AS: Until the 'eye of wisdom' is open one needs association with *sādhus* who have realised the Self so that one can become aware of one's own Self. One should also study and practise the teachings of the Guru.

If you associate with bad or worldly people your meditation will be disturbed by their thought currents. It is best to avoid their company. One should not hate or dislike them, one should just stay out of their way.

*Q: Should one avoid worldly things until one has attained some degree of mind control?*

AS: As long as the body is alive it needs food, clothing and shelter. It is not a hindrance to *jnāna* to earn money to meet one's basic needs.

*Q: Some people have the freedom to give up worldly things. Others do not. They have to live and work with worldly people all the time.*

AS: Before we came into this world all the incidents of our life were predestined: where we have to live, what acts we have to perform, etc. If we desire anything other than our *prārabdha*, that which was already destined for us, we cannot attain it.

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<sup>3</sup> When Annamalai Swami quotes from the works of Tamil authors or scriptural works he often just gives the gist rather than the verse itself. The material quoted should therefore be regarded as a paraphrase rather than a translation.

*Q: So there is no point in planning future projects. It is better to live with what comes, day by day.*

AS: According to one's *prārabdha* the efforts which are necessary and which have to happen will arise in one's mind.

*Q: So we only think that we have choices. The sense of choice is not real.*

AS: Correct! All the difficulties that we experience in life have been given to us by Bhagavan in order to turn our minds towards the Self.

A man once asked Bhagavan, 'Why did God choose this way of giving grace only through misery? Why did He not choose some other way?'

Bhagavan replied, 'It is His way. Who are you to question Him?'

On another occasion a devotee asked, 'Why does God not appear before me?'

Bhagavan answered, 'If He appears before you in person you will not leave Him in peace. He is not appearing because He is afraid of you. He is afraid of manifesting in a form that you can see because He knows that if He does you will just give Him a long list of things that you want.'

*Q: Is it desirable to want to see God?*

AS: Manikkavachagar said in one of his songs: 'God is not a person, nor is He any particular thing. Yet without God there is nothing because He alone is everything.'

To see one's Self and to see this same Self in all that is, that is seeing God.

*Q: So, it is better to want only the formless Self?*

AS: I once heard Bhagavan say to Paul Brunton: 'If you do *upāsana* [meditation] on the all-pervading Self, you will get infinite energy.' All beings, all things, all people in the world are your own Self. They are all indivisibly part of you. If you can see all as your Self, how can you do harm to anyone else? When you have that clear vision, whatever you do to others, you know that it is done to your Self only.

To like one thing instead of another is *samsāra*: to like and love all things is wisdom. If one sees from this realisation that all people

are one's own Self, one enjoys the same peace that one enjoys in the deep-sleep state. The difference is, one enjoys it here and now while one is awake.

*Q: Are there no breaks at all in the jñāni's awareness of the Self? For example, if he is engrossed in reading a good book, will his full attention be always on the book? Will he simultaneously be aware that he is the Self?*

AS: If there are breaks in his Self-awareness this means that he is not yet a *jñāni*. Before one becomes established in this state without any breaks, without changes, one has to contact and enjoy this state many times. By steady meditation it finally becomes permanent.

It is very difficult to attain Self-abidance, but once it is attained it is retained effortlessly and never lost. It is a little like putting a rocket into space. A great effort and great energy are required to escape the earth's gravitational field. If the rocket is not going fast enough, gravity will pull it back to earth. But once it has escaped the pull of gravity it can stay out in space quite effortlessly without falling back to earth.

*Q: I have read many accounts of Gurus and saints giving blessings. I cannot quite understand what this blessing is. Is it that the saint gives out or releases some energy from within himself? Does he make an agreement for something to happen within consciousness? How does it work?*

AS: To have love towards another human being is a blessing and to have anger towards him is a curse.

*Q: Does this mean that when we love a Guru we are attracting his blessings? Is it one's karma that one should meet a Guru and love him?*

AS: One only comes into contact with a sage when one's good *karmas* bear fruit. Only those who have accumulated good *karma* from many lives get the chance to meet and love a sage.

*Q: Is the blessing that one receives from a sage part of one's destiny? Can the sage give a blessing that will take away part of one's karma or change it in some way?*

AS: The blessing of a *jñāni* reduces the intensity of one's *prā-*

*rabdha karma* [the *karma* which must be experienced in the present life]. Even though it does not change the *karma*, it reduces its intensity. Being under the protection of the Guru is a little like being under the shade of a big tree. When a person who has been out in the sun rests under a tree, his discomfort is slightly alleviated.

*Q: This is the last time that we shall be able to come and see you. We are returning to France tomorrow. We would like to thank you for all the helpful advice you have given us.*

AS: If you have any more doubts when you return to France, enquire and reflect, 'To whom have these doubts come?' If you challenge them in this way they will soon disappear.

*Q: Here, in this place, the feeling of the Self is very clear. In France it will not be so easy to stay in contact with this feeling.*

AS: If there is constant meditation, doubts like these will not be able to enter your mind.

*Q: These visits to Swami have been the highlights of our trip to India.*

AS: If you have benefited from them it is all Bhagavan's grace.

*Q: When I read the Ramanasramam publications Bhagavan often appears to be very strict and stern. Was Bhagavan as kind to you as you have been to us?*

AS: Different people elicited different responses from him. In my case he was always very kind and considerate. But you should not judge Bhagavan by his behaviour. If he got angry with people or ignored them it was always for their own good. He was transmitting grace through his anger as well as through his kindness.

*Q: Bhagavan's body has gone now. I know intellectually that he is the Self and that he is everywhere but I still sometimes wish that I could have the good fortune of sitting in his physical presence. I know that the body is ultimately not important but I would feel so happy and secure if I knew that I could go and talk or just sit with Bhagavan every time I had a problem.*

AS: Everything you see is Bhagavan's body. The guiding presence that you desire is shining through all these forms and animating

them. Don't be attached to Bhagavan's form or body. The real Bhagavan is beyond form and beyond death.

Though water flows through the mouth of a stone tiger statue, everyone knows that it is not coming from the tiger; we all know that it is coming from the reservoir. Similarly, Bhagavan now speaks through everyone who knows and experiences him as he really is.

6

AS: Waking, dreaming and deep sleep are like a long dream happening in consciousness. If we see a dream, and are involved in that dream, all the events that we see will seem real for the duration of the dream. But when we awake, the dream disappears and we realise that nothing ever really happened except in our minds. When you awake to real consciousness, the whole process of waking, dreaming and sleeping disappears like last night's dream. You immediately understand that it was never real. Right now, because we are ignorant of the Self, we are dreaming this world and imagining that it is real. We are so engrossed in the dream, we believe that it is the only reality.

This waking life is just a long dream which keeps our attention away from what we really are. If you take the attitude that all the happenings in the world are dream events, your mind becomes tranquil. It is only when you take the dream world to be real that you get agitated.

*Q: I feel strongly that life is a long dream but I cannot see through the dream. For many years it has been like this.*

AS: If you really believed that all life was a dream, nothing in the world would ever trouble you. If you still have problems and worries, like not being able to see through the dream, it means that you have still not completely ceased to identify with what temporarily appears in your consciousness.

You should enquire, 'Who is not able to penetrate through the dream?'

The true 'I' is not identified with the dream. If you don't forget your real Self, waking, dreaming and sleeping do not affect you. The things around you are always changing, but what we really are remains changeless.

Pure existence, 'I am' without anything predicated or attached to it, is common to all. No one can deny his own existence. In this 'I am' there are no limitations, but when we wrongly identify this 'I am' with the body and the mind and create a limited identity for ourselves, misery begins.

Only in this human birth are the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep provided along with the sense of something that is beyond them, something that can be experienced and lived.

We see a dream, yet on waking up the dream disappears and we exist in the waking state. On going to sleep the whole world disappears. By observing these three states we come to understand that it is their nature to appear and disappear. If we investigate the matter further by carefully scrutinising the nature of this thing called mind, we can have the direct experience that consciousness alone is what we really are. When we cease to identify with the body and the mind we become aware that this pure consciousness is unaffected by any of the changes and events that appear to take place within it.

The only purpose of life is to learn how to abide in that consciousness. We have to learn how to rest in *turīya*, the fourth and primal state which is the witness of the other three states.

Doing any form of *sādhana* without first understanding that the individual self is non-existent is self-indulgence. It is a form of spiritual entertainment in which the illusory 'I' plays games with itself.

Saint Tayumanavar once said, 'Why all these *mahā* yogas [great yogas]? All these yogas are *māyā*!'

If you try to meditate without understanding that your real nature is Self, and Self alone, your meditation practice will only lead you to more mental bondage.

Bhagavan once said, 'To keep the mind in the Self all you have to do is remain still'.

To realise the Self you don't actually have to do anything except be still. Just give up identifying with the mind and hold onto the Self. That is enough. Be still and cultivate the awareness 'I am the Self; the Self is all'. What difficulties can arise from doing a simple practice like this?

*Q: The mind doesn't want to be ignored. It wants to spin round and*

*round for ever. I came to you because I thought that you might be able to help me to gain some control over my wayward thoughts.*

AS: 'Who came here for help?' Find out who that person is. Don't automatically assume that he exists and that he needs help with his problems. If you think like this your problems will increase, not decrease.

Identifying oneself with the body and the mind results in ignorance of the Self. This is how the ego takes birth. Detaching ourselves and disengaging from the body and the mind results in the death of the ego.

Bhagavan once said to me: 'The one who limits the Self by believing himself to be the body and the mind has killed his own Self. For killing the Self he has to be punished. The punishment is birth and death and continuous misery.'

*Q: Is the ending of misery determined by prārabdha karma, or can we bring it nearer by personal effort?*

AS: The misery comes to an end only by realising the Self, not by any other means.

*Q: Can this happen at any time?*

AS: Here and now you are already the Self. You don't need time to realise the Self, all you need is correct understanding. Each moment you identify yourself with the body and the mind, you are going in the direction of ego and misery. The moment you give up that identification, you are moving towards your real Self, towards happiness.

*Q: We are accustomed to making distinctions between things. You say 'Meditate that you are the Self'. If I try to generate this feeling 'I am the Self' it will not be the real thing. It will just be another idea in the mind. Can thinking about this idea really help me?*

AS: When I say, 'Meditate on the Self' I am asking you to be the Self, not think about it. Be aware of what remains when thoughts stop. Be aware of the consciousness that is the origin of all your thoughts. Be that consciousness. Feel that that is what you really are. If you do this you are meditating on the Self. But if you cannot stabilise in that consciousness because your *vāsanās* are too strong and too active, it is beneficial to hold onto the thought 'I am the Self; I am everything'. If you meditate in this way you will not be

cooperating with the *vāsanās* that are blocking your Self-awareness. If you don't cooperate with your *vāsanās*, sooner or later they are bound to leave you.

If this method doesn't appeal to you, then just watch the mind with full attention. Whenever the mind wanders, become aware of it. See how thoughts connect with each other and watch how this ghost called mind catches hold of all your thoughts and says 'This is my thought'. Watch the ways of the mind without identifying with them in any way. If you give your mind your full, detached attention, you begin to understand the futility of all mental activities. Watch the mind wandering here and there, seeking out useless or unnecessary things or ideas which will ultimately only create misery for itself. Watching the mind gives us a knowledge of its inner processes. It gives us an incentive to stay detached from all our thoughts. Ultimately, if we try hard enough, it gives us the ability to remain as consciousness, unaffected by transient thoughts.

*Q: Is it better to meditate like this alone, or is there some advantage in meditating with other people?*

AS: If seekers are always in the company of worldly people who take the mind and body to be 'I', they will get affected by their mind currents. Self-ignorance can be contagious. Don't associate with worldly people. Either do meditation alone or do it with people who are also striving to give up their mental attachments.

*Q: I think that this is very helpful advice. But in the West it is very difficult to practise with other like-minded people. Spiritual people are few and far between.*

AS: What you say may be true. If you make your meditation strong and constant, no one can disturb it. If it is our destiny to live with unspiritual people, outwardly we should act just as they do. But inwardly, our total attention should flow towards the Self.

*Q: This practice you speak of is a totally new way of living.*

AS: This is the real life. All other lives are *māyā*. Don't take the *māyā* life to be real. Saint Manikkavachagar once said: 'Lord Siva gave me the boon of not being able to give reality to this *māyā* life.'

*Q: We are so accustomed to māyā. That is why it is so difficult for us to make progress.*

AS: Again, enquire, 'For whom is this difficulty?' Don't give reality to the very thing that is causing you all your trouble.

*Q: Do we have no other function in the world other than discovering our own Self? Is it not our duty to show a little love and compassion to other people?*

AS: If you discover yourself you will be able to give love and compassion to the whole world. It will flow automatically from you. The sun is full of light which it gives to the world without any partiality. If you become full of spiritual light by realising the Self, that light overflows everywhere. That overflowing of your Self is love and compassion for the whole universe. One may try to do some good to others but not much real good will result unless you know yourself. How can a blind man help other people?

*Q: I can understand what you say: that we are not the body and the mind, and that this truth has to be experienced more and more. But we have to take care of this body and this mind. Also, we must do something in the world. We cannot just sit and meditate all the time. If we do that we will be a burden on others.*

AS: We must take care of the body by giving it food, shelter and clothing. This is necessary because the journey to the Self is only easy when the body is healthy. If a ship is not in need of repair, if it is in good condition, we can easily use it to go on a journey. But we should not forget the purpose for which we have been given this body. We should not get side-tracked by thinking too much about good health or worrying about other people's problems. Our purpose in life is to realise the Self. It is an easy matter to get a little food and find somewhere congenial to live and meditate. Once we have achieved this we should have no further interest in the world and its problems.

*Q: The people in this country seem to worship many different gods. Who are all these different deities and why is it necessary to have so many?*

AS: There is only one God but his manifestations are many. When the one God is creating He is called Brahma, while protecting and preserving He is called Vishnu, while destroying He is called Siva. It is just like the different functions of one government, or the

different functions of the body. There are many different organs doing different things but the body is one.

## 7

*Q: I went to Skandashram yesterday. As I sat there, for no reason at all, tears started to come. I cried and cried. I am a little puzzled by this. Why should something like this happen?*

AS: A similar thing happened to me once. When I was very young I went to the town and the temple where Siva first appeared to Manikkavachagar. When I sat in the temple tears flowed down my face. Tears like this are often a sign of grace. When your tears are for God rather than for worldly things, the mind and the heart are purified. If you want God so much that you cry when you call on Him, He will surely come to you. When a baby cries, its mother comes to feed it. When a devotee cries because he is hungry for grace, God sends the grace to nourish him.

*Q: I am repeating Ōm Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanāya [Ōm. Obeisance to Bhagavan Sri Ramana]. I am also doing some Zen meditation. Should I continue with both?*

AS: Without Guru *bhakti* there can be no *jnāna*. But it is better to practise Bhagavan's teachings rather than merely repeat his name. The best *tapas* is to walk along the path that has been illumined by the Guru. If you understand Bhagavan's teachings and practise them by always abiding in the Self, you become one with Bhagavan. This is the real Guru *bhakti*.

In *Vivēkachūdāmani* it is said, 'Of the *crores* of paths to realise the Self, the best is *bhakti*'.

But Sankara then goes on to define *bhakti* by saying, 'The highest *bhakti* is steady devotion to the Self, always abiding in the Self'.

*Q: Many people feel an urge to worship something which is apart from themselves. They are not very attracted to the Self. Instead they want to worship an external Guru or a God.*

AS: Worshipping forms of the deity or of the Guru is a useful aid for as long as one is not mature enough to know the formless

reality. These forms are just signals which point to the unmanifest reality.

If you want to point out a particular star to someone you might say, 'You see the tip of that leaf on the tree? The star is just to the left of it.'

The leaf is only a signal which helps you to shift your attention to what you really want to see. The form of the Guru is a similar signpost. He exists with a form as a perpetual reminder to us that our attention should always be on the formless reality.

*Q: I am following the path of devotion and surrender. I like to do pūjā and other ritual acts because they help me to keep my attention on God. Is it good to restrict our concept of God to a particular form?*

AS: *Pūjās* and different aspects of God are for those who want worldly things. As God is present in all forms, the best *pūjā* is to worship Him in all forms. The whole universe is a manifestation of God. If you can love all beings in this universe equally you are performing the highest and greatest *pūjā*.

*Q: I am trying to surrender to the Guru. How can I tell if I am succeeding? It is very easy to say 'I surrender' but this is only a verbal statement. It doesn't mean that real surrender has taken place. I think that I have achieved some success with my practice but how can I be sure?*

AS: If you have really surrendered to the Guru you will see the Guru in all forms. Wherever you go you will only see the Guru. If your mind is not steady it means that your surrender is not complete. Your Guru may take several forms. If your destiny is to go to several different places, your Guru may take the form of different saints. But even if he does there is still only one Guru because the Guru is the formless Self. You must learn to see the Guru in all things; you must learn to see the Guru everywhere.

Kunju Swami once visited Quilon Math. On returning he told Bhagavan that he had not done *namaskāram* to the Guru of the *math*.

Bhagavan told him, 'Why do you limit Bhagavan to this form? The Guru is one not many.'

Seshadri Swami was once seen doing *namaskāram* to a donkey.

When he was asked why, he replied, 'This is not a donkey, it is *Brahman*'.

On another occasion when somebody asked him why he was staring at a buffalo he replied, 'I don't see any buffalo, I only see *Brahman*'.

*Q: Sometimes God appears to devotees in a physical form. Is the form of God real or is it just imagination?*

AS: If you see names and forms you are looking at your imagination. If you only see the Self you are looking at reality.

Namdev and Tukaram had great devotion to Krishna. They thought of Him so much that He often appeared before them and talked to them.

I once asked Bhagavan, 'How did these saints see Krishna? Was the form they saw a real form?'

Bhagavan answered, 'How did they see Him? In just the same way that I see you and you see me. They would have seen a physical form in just the same way that ordinary people see ordinary forms.'

These words had such a powerful effect on me that I immediately entered a blissful state in which all my hairs stood on end.

When devotees told Bhagavan that they had had visions of Rama or Krishna, he would sometimes reply, 'Oh really, and where is Rama now?'

When the devotee admitted that he could no longer see the vision Bhagavan would say, 'Visions come and go; they are not permanent. Find out who is having the vision.'

The formless Self is the only reality. It is the real nature of God. In His real form God never appears or disappears; He is always present. If you turn your attention towards the Self and keep it there you will experience Him as He really is.

*Q: Swami, I sometimes feel tremendous grace and have a great sense of well-being. This feeling is steady for a few days and then it goes away. Why is this?*

AS: If the awareness of grace does not last it means that your surrender is only partial. Don't be attached to your problems and don't worry about them. Let all your problems go and put them in

the hands of Bhagavan. Cultivate the feeling 'This is God's problem, not mine'.

When you surrender to Bhagavan you should not worry about any of your problems and needs. You should have faith that Bhagavan is going to take care of everything. If you still find yourself worrying about anything, you have not fully surrendered.

Tayumanuvar once asked Siva to give him a boon:

You who carry all the troubles of the world, please take all my troubles too. Take from me all sense that I am the doer. You alone act; You do everything through me.

Surrender completely and accept that everything that happens to you and the world is God's will.

*Q: How to distinguish between acts which occur as God's will and acts which are brought about by the ego?*

AS: This is very simple. When surrender is complete, everything is God. Everything that happens is then His action. In that state there is peace, harmony and an absence of thoughts. Until that stage is reached, all acts are by the ego.

*Q: You talk a lot about effort but rarely speak about grace. Don't you attach much importance to grace?*

AS: Grace is important; in fact it is essential. It is even more important than effort. Realisation of the Self comes about through both effort and grace. When one makes a steady effort to abide in the Self one receives the Guru's grace in abundance. The grace comes not only through the form of one's Guru. When you meditate earnestly all the *jīvanmuktas* of the past and present respond to your efforts by sending you blessings of light.

*Q: Should one have a strong desire for realisation? Is such a desire necessary if we want to do earnest sādhanā? Or should we surrender even this desire and just get on with our meditation?*

AS: Once, as Narada was going to Vaikunta,<sup>4</sup> he met two *sādhus*

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<sup>4</sup> Vaikunta is the heavenly world which is presided over by Vishnu. In Hindu mythology Narada is a messenger of the Gods. He has a mischievous disposition which he uses to stir up trouble both on earth and in the heavenly realms. His pranks are playful rather than malicious. His intervention in other people's affairs is always beneficial in the long run.

who were doing *tapas*. They asked him where he was going and he replied, 'Vaikunta'. They both wanted to know how their *tapas* was progressing so they asked Narada to ask Vishnu when they would attain liberation. Narada went to Vaikunta and returned with the information.

To the first *sādhū* he said, 'You are very close. After four or five more births you will get liberation.'

The *sādhū* was rather annoyed by this prediction because he felt that he was almost enlightened.

'I have been doing *tapas* since my birth,' he said, 'and I know that I have done *tapas* in previous births. Why do I have to wait for four or five more births? This prediction cannot be correct.'

Narada said to the second *sādhū*: 'You have been doing *tapas* under a tamarind tree. For you too liberation will eventually come, but first you will have to take as many more births as there are leaves on this tree.'

The second *sādhū* was very happy to hear this. '*Mōksha* is certain for me!' he exclaimed. 'It will come one day. Vishnu Himself has guaranteed it!'

At that moment a big wind came and blew all the leaves off the tree. As the last leaf touched the ground he realised the Self.

The *sādhū* who was patient and contented showed that he had truly surrendered. The other *sādhū* showed his immaturity through his frustration and his impatience. If you have truly surrendered, you don't demand realisation from God. You are content with whatever He gives you.

*Q: It seems that so much time is needed to realise the Self; many lifetimes in fact. For me, realisation always seems to be an event in the distant future.*

AS: You don't need hundreds of lives to realise the Self. In fact you don't need any time at all. Your idea of time is one of the things that is holding you in bondage. Time is one of the properties of the mind. Liberation does not come after a period of time because there is no time in the Self. Liberation comes when you fully understand and experience that there is no one who needs liberation. That understanding and that experience only arise when the mind and its inbuilt ideas of time have ceased to function. If you think about time and start to worry about how much longer it will be before you realise the Self, your attention

will be on the mind and not on the Self. You can only make progress while the mind is on the Self.

*Q: You often say that satsang is important. Can I have satsang of Bhagavan even though he is now dead? I am asking this because I once had a very powerful experience of his presence while I was in Switzerland. At that time Bhagavan had been dead for many years.*

AS: Bhagavan is at all times and in all places. Since he is the Self and not any particular physical form, it is of little importance that the body that we took to be Bhagavan is now dead. Radio waves can be received anywhere. If you tune yourself to Bhagavan's wave length, which means abiding in the Self, you can be aware of him broadcasting his grace wherever you are.

There is never any separation from Bhagavan. Every atom in the material universe is Bhagavan. Every act which happens in the world is done by Bhagavan alone. Every being, every form is Bhagavan's form. When you are clearly attuned to Bhagavan you will experience clarity and peace. You will receive guidance wherever you are.

## 8

*Q: I am convinced that I am, but I am not convinced of what I am. Intellectually I know that I am the Self but I don't experience this. I have to make a lot of effort.*

AS: To experience the Self you have to dive deep into the consciousness 'I am'.

*Q: You mean I should keep the mind there?*

AS: Yes. When you see the rope as a rope there is no snake. You also know that there never was a snake.

When you cease to imagine that you are a body and a mind, reality shines of its own accord. If you stabilise in this state you can see that the mind didn't go anywhere; you understand that it never really existed. 'Keeping the mind in its source' is just another way of saying 'Understanding that it never existed'.

*Q: But how is one to awaken from perpetual body-consciousness? For consciousness to manifest one must have a body.*

AS: If there is the constant meditation that consciousness is your own reality in which all phenomena are appearing and disappearing, that meditation is the activity of the sattvic mind. It is this activity which erases and dissolves the *tamas* and *rajas* which cover the reality.

The human body is the only vehicle in which it is very convenient to realise the unmanifest Self. With the body and the mind we can investigate and discover the reality which remains unaffected by the body and the mind. With a good car we can travel fast and reach our destination. We know that the car is not the person; the person is in the car. We should regard the body in the same way that we regard a car. We should not think 'I am the body'. We should think 'This body is a useful vehicle. If I maintain it and give it proper fuel, I can use it to take me to my destination.'

*Q: No matter how quiet I get or how still my mind is, I never get to see the world as an indivisible whole. Even when the mind is completely still, if I open my eyes I still see a world of separate objects.*

AS: When the one who sees vanishes, the world of multiplicity goes with it. When the person who sees vanishes, you don't see the unity and indivisibility, you *are* that unity. You can never see the Self or *Brahman*, you can only be it.

There are many pearls in a necklace, but inside them all is one connecting thread. Similarly, there is one consciousness which manifests in all forms, in all bodies. We don't see it that way. We think 'I am this one pearl. Therefore all the other pearls are different from me.' By thinking in this way we deliberately ignore the common thread which connects them all. If we examine each individual pearl there may seem to be a lot of differences but the thread inside all of them is one. The thread that connects and binds the whole universe into a single entity is your own Self. Bodies appear different on the outside but the consciousness which animates them all is one and the same in all bodies.

This is not an exact analogy because from the standpoint of the Self there is no difference between the pearls and the thread. They are all the one reality. Body, mind and world are all manifestations of the one reality.

We are all making a big mistake: we take the body and the mind to be the Self and forget the infinite, immanent conscious-

ness which is the truth of our existence. The *jnāni* is aware that all bodies, minds and this world exist within his own Self. But one who has not realised the truth of his Self sees himself and others as different entities. Such a person lives in and among differences.

*Q: We are so used to seeing differences. It is impossible to stop.*

AS: This habit of making distinctions, of seeing differences, can be given up only when we realise the Self. As long as we remain at the body-mind level it is not possible to give it up. So go to the source of this manifestation. There are no differences there.

Giving up the identity with the body and the mind is *tapas*, *samādhi*, *dhyāna* and *nishthā* [abiding in and as the Self].

Spiritual seekers have a very strange habit: they are always looking for a way to reach, attain, discover, experience or realise the Self. They try so many things because they cannot comprehend that they are already the Self. This is like running around looking for one's eyes with one's own eyes.

Why should you imagine that it is some new experience to be discovered or found? You are the Self right now, and you are aware of it right now. Do you need a new experience to prove that you exist? The feeling 'I am existing' is the Self. You pretend that you are not experiencing it, or cover it up with all kinds of false ideas, and then you run around looking for it as if it were something external to be reached or found. There is a story about someone like this.

Once a king imagined that he was a poverty-stricken peasant.

He thought, 'If I go and meet the king he may be able to help me by giving me some money.'

He searched for the king in many places but he couldn't find him anywhere. Ultimately he became very depressed because his search was not yielding any results. One day he met a man on the road who asked him why he was so depressed.

He answered, 'I am searching for the king. I think that he can solve all my problems and make me happy but I can't find him anywhere.'

The man, who had already recognized him, said with some astonishment, 'But you yourself are the king!'

The king came to his senses and remembered who he was. His problems all ended the moment he remembered his real identity.

You may think that this king was fairly stupid but he had at

least enough sense to recognise the truth when it was told to him.

The Guru may tell his disciples a thousand times, 'You are the Self; you are not what you imagine yourself to be,' but none of them ever believes him. They all keep asking the Guru for methods and routes to reach the place where they already are.

*Q: Why don't we give up our false ideas as soon as we are told that they are false?*

AS: We have identified with our false ideas for many previous lifetimes. The habit is very strong. But not so strong that it cannot be dissolved through constant meditation.

*Q: The sādhanika [spiritual seeker] has many ideas: 'I am a jīva,' 'I am bound,' 'I have to do sādhanā,' 'I have to attain realisation'. Should we forget all these ideas? Are they all obstacles to true understanding?*

AS: Yes, forget them all. 'I am the Self, I am all'. Hold onto this awareness. All other paths are roundabout.

*Q: Bhagavan said that repeating 'I am the Self' or 'I am not this body' is an aid to enquiry but it does not constitute the enquiry itself.*

AS: The meditation 'I am not the body or the mind, I am the immanent Self' is a great aid for as long as one is not able to do self-enquiry properly or constantly.

Bhagavan said, 'Keeping the mind in the Heart is self-enquiry'. If you cannot do this by asking 'Who am I?' or by taking the 'I'-thought back to its source, then meditation on the awareness 'I am the all-pervasive Self' is a great aid.

Bhagavan often said that we should read and study the *Ribhu Gītā* regularly.

In the *Ribhu Gītā* it is said: 'That *bhāvanā* [mental attitude] "I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am *Brahman*, I am everything" is to be repeated again and again until this becomes the natural state.'

Bhagavan sat with us every day while we chanted extracts from the *Ribhu Gītā* which affirm the reality of the Self. It is true that he said that these repetitions are only an aid to self-enquiry, but they are a very powerful aid.

By practising this way the mind becomes more and more

attuned with the reality. When the mind has become purified by this practice it is easier to take it back to its source and keep it there. When one is able to abide in the Self directly, one doesn't need aids like this. But if this is not possible these practices can definitely help one.

## 9

*Q: I have a sister who believes that the world is about to end in a nuclear holocaust. Many other people feel the same way. Does Swami have any views on this?*

AS: I do not think the world will be destroyed in the near future. But even if it is about to be destroyed it is not something that you should think about or worry about. Keep your attention in the present; keep it on the Self. If you establish yourself in the Self you need not worry about the future of the world. If you realise the Self, nothing can touch you. You can destroy a *jnāni's* body, you can destroy the world that he lives in, but you cannot touch or change his Self-awareness.

The disappearance of the entire universe will not effect the *jnāni* because *jnāna* is indestructible. Consciousness, the substratum of the universe, cannot be changed in any way. When the world appears in consciousness, consciousness itself does not undergo any change. So when the universe disappears, consciousness is unaffected.

Everything that appears will one day disappear. There is no permanence in the world of forms. But that unchangeable consciousness in which all forms appear can never be diminished, destroyed or altered in any way. If you learn to be that consciousness you come to understand that nothing can touch or destroy you. If, instead, you identify with some transient form you will always be worrying about the possible extinction of that form.

Ignorance causes us to worry about the possible destruction of the body. If you make your well-being dependent on the well-being of the body, you will always be worrying and suffering. When you know, from direct experience, that you are the Self, you realise that there is no birth and no death. You realise that you are deathless and immortal. Self-realisation is sometimes called the immortal state because it never ends and because it is never

destroyed or even altered. If you keep your attention on the Self you can attain this immortality. If you attain it, in that ultimate state of being you will find that there is no birth, no death, no desires, no fears, no worries, no mind and no world.

*Q: To keep the mind in the Self one must have no desires for anything other than the Self. This is a very difficult state to attain. The desire to seek pleasures in the outside world always seems to be stronger than the desire to seek pleasure in the Self. Why is this so?*

AS: All happiness ultimately comes from the Self. It does not come from the mind, the body or from external objects. If you have a great desire for a mango, when you finally eat one there is a great feeling of pleasure. When a desire like this is fulfilled, the mind sinks a little way into the Self and enjoys some of the bliss that is always present there. Then it rises again. It remembers the happiness and tries to repeat the experience by eating more mangoes or by gratifying other desires.

Most people are completely unaware that pleasure and happiness come from the Self, not from the mind or the body. Because most people have only experienced the peace of the Self when a great desire has been fulfilled, they come to the conclusion that the pursuit of desires is the only way to get an experience of happiness or peace.

If you try to follow this standard route to happiness you will end up with a lot of frustration and a lot of suffering. You may occasionally experience a few brief moments of pleasure, but for the rest of the time you will be experiencing the pain of frustrated desires, of desires which don't seem to produce any pleasure when they are fulfilled.

If you try to repeat pleasures again and again the novelty soon wears off. A mango, which you have been looking forward to for days, may give you a few seconds of happiness when you eat it, but your pleasure will not be prolonged by eating five or six more. Prolonged indulgence is more likely to produce pain than pleasure.

Most people in the world spend their whole lives self-indulgently pursuing goals which they think will produce happiness for them. Most of these people never stop to do their mental accounts properly. If they did they would realise that each ten seconds of happiness is followed by hours or days when there is no happiness

at all. Some people do realise this, but instead of giving up this way of life, they indulge in it even more. They think that with a little more effort and a little more sensory, mental or emotional indulgence they can expand the short periods of happiness and contract the longer intervening periods when happiness is not experienced.

This approach never works. If there are many strong desires in the mind, the mind cannot sink completely into the Self and experience the full peace and bliss that is there. The mind may experience a little of that peace if a great desire is suddenly fulfilled, but it will only be a brief, temporary experience. The mind cannot stay in the Self while it is full of desires and activities. It will rise again after a few seconds and begin to pursue its next external goal.

The desire-filled mind only experiences the bliss of the Self in a very diluted form. If you want the full bliss of the Self, and if you want to experience it permanently, you will have to give up all your desires and attachments. There is no other way. The mind cannot rest quietly in the depths of the Self until it has learned to ignore all the impulses that try to make it look for pleasure and satisfaction in the outside world.

All desires can cause you trouble, even spiritual ones. Sometimes, even a desire to meditate can be a hindrance. When I once wanted to do meditation in solitude in a cave on Arunachala, Bhagavan saw that this was not part of my *prārabdha* and advised me to give up this desire. He said that this was a *sankalpa* [desire] which, if pursued, would cause a future birth.

‘Do meditation in Palakottu itself,’ he said. ‘Be still there and don’t go to any other place.’

Before that, when I first came to Palakottu, I told Bhagavan that my only wishes were to cook and eat rice kanji and to live here and do meditation in solitude.

Bhagavan replied: ‘Why have even these desires? What is to be has already been determined. Be still, be without desire and let whatever is to be come to be.’

*Q: The core of both Bhagavan’s and Swami’s teachings seems to be, ‘I am not the body or the mind. I am the Self.’ It seems that all desires arise only because we identify with the body and the mind. From this it follows logically that if one could drop this habit one would automatically be in a desireless state. Is this true?*

AS: It is true. If one gives up the idea that one is the body and the mind, one is already living on a higher plane.

*Q: This matter of higher planes interests me. I have read somewhere that Bhagavan once said that it is very difficult to realise the Self in this life. He also apparently said that if one has tried and failed one may be given birth in another form on a higher plane. I want to know if this is true, and if it is true, how it works. If there are such planes, are all the people there at the same level? Do they all achieve liberation in the same amount of time? It is very difficult to be free of desires here on earth because there are so many distractions. Is life on these higher planes just as difficult, or is it more easy? Do people on these higher planes ever have to take a human birth again?*

AS: Some ripe souls who have failed to realise the Self may take birth on a higher plane. To take birth in such a world one must be very pure. One must have no worldly desires. Only those who have dedicated their whole lives to the pursuit of *jnāna* can hope for such a rebirth. Such people sometimes take their last birth on a higher plane and attain realisation there.

The devotees who have not extinguished all desires except the desire for *jnāna* will be reborn on earth. The earth is a training ground for *vairāgya* [detachment]. That is why life here is so treacherous and deceptive. One must learn dispassion here on earth before one can think about getting *jnāna* or a rebirth on a higher plane.

## 10

*Q: I am trying all the time to be constantly aware of 'I-I'. I feel that this 'I' is a centre from which I am looking at my personality and mind. I feel that the mind has come out of this centre. Sometimes I feel that even this centre should disappear. Is this correct?*

AS: When one is in the centre, the 'I am', there is no coming in or going out. It is as it is. If you are not aware of it as it really is, it might appear to you that things are coming in or going out of this centre. If you have the correct awareness of the centre, the Heart, you understand that there is no coming or going, no movement and no change.

*Q: Is it better to meditate for long periods of time or for short periods?*

AS: Except when one is in the sleep state, the effort to meditate should continue always. Just like the river which is flowing constantly towards the sea, our awareness should flow without a break. We should not have this concept that we should meditate at certain times. The meditation on the Self should continue while walking, working, eating, etc. It should be naturally flowing in all places at all times.

*Q: What is the difference between dhāranā and dhyāna?*

AS: Constant *dhyāna* [meditation] is called *dhāranā*. In *Kaivalya Navanītam* it is asked: 'How to destroy this causal body in which the *vāsanās* are kept in seed form?'

The Guru replies, 'I am the absolute, perfect consciousness. In this perfect consciousness all universes exist merely as appearances.' If this *dhyāna* flows in your mind, how can ignorance arise?

*Q: S.S. Cohen says in one of his books that when you have the experience of sphurana<sup>5</sup> the Heart is ready to manifest itself. Is this sphurana before or after dhāranā?*

AS: The *sphurana* comes after *dhāranā*. *Sphurana* is the experience of the Heart when it begins to make itself known to the advanced devotee. It is a temporary experience of the Self which is experienced when the mind begins to be engulfed by the Heart.

*Q: Does everyone who follows the path of self-enquiry eventually have the experience of sphurana?*

AS: If they are able to make the mind stay in the Heart they will have it.

*Q: People who follow other paths sometimes experience samādhi states. Will they also have the experience of sphurana?*

AS: If one unceasingly follows the path of *japa* or *yoga*, the mind

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<sup>5</sup> The following extract is from *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, p. 4. 'I have always had a doubt what exactly the word *sphurana* means. So I asked Bhagavan and he said "... which shines or illuminates." ... I asked Bhagavan what it is that shines, whether it is the ego or the Self. He said that it was neither one nor the other but something in between the two, that is something which is a combination of the 'I' (Self) and the 'I'-thought (ego) and that the Self is without even this *sphurana*.'

will eventually merge in the *sphurana*. At the time of merging the experience will come.

This *sphurana* is the light or the radiance of the 'I am'. When you are close to merging with the real 'I' you feel its emanations. This real 'I' is the real name and form of God. The first and most accurate name of God is 'I'. The awareness 'I am' is the original and primordial *mantra*.

*Q: So the 'I'-mantra is even prior to the pranava,<sup>a</sup> the sound of Ōm?*

AS: Yes, that is what Bhagavan said on several occasions.

This consciousness, the 'I am', is existing and shining always, but your awareness of it is obstructed by the ego in just the same way that a shadow hides the moon during an eclipse. The shadow over the moon is only visible because of the moonlight behind it. Without this light the shadow of the eclipse cannot be seen. Like this, we are conscious of the body, the mind and the world even when they obstruct our clear vision only because of the light of the Self. By the light of the Self all this is seen.

*Q: How did this single, unbroken 'I' become the many different things and people that we see in the world?*

AS: It didn't. It always remains single and unbroken. Your defective vision and your misperceptions give you the impression that the one became the many. The Self has never undergone any change or transformation except in your imagination.

When we identify ourselves with the body and the mind, the one appears to become many. When one's energy is diverted from the mind and the outside world towards the Self, the illusion of multiplicity fades away.

Go deeply into this feeling of 'I'. Be aware of it so strongly and so intensely that no other thoughts have the energy to arise and distract you. If you hold this feeling of 'I' long enough and strongly enough, the false 'I' will vanish leaving only the unbroken awareness of the real, immanent 'I', consciousness itself.

*Q: It seems so logical and so simple but it's so hard to give up one's defective vision.*

AS: Don't be oppressed or depressed by such thoughts. Keep on

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<sup>a</sup> One Hindu theory of cosmology maintains that the universe originally manifested out of the *pranava*, which is the sound of Ōm.

asking yourself, 'Who finds it hard?', 'Who has defective vision?' Don't allow thoughts like these to take your attention away from the source, the Self.

*Q: This is just my problem. The accumulated energy of my mind—all its hopes, fears, desires, worries, likes and dislikes—is too much for me. The little energy I periodically put into self-enquiry is never enough to stop the spinning mind for more than one or two seconds. There is too much outward-moving energy in my mind. I cannot reach the source of the mind at all.*

AS: Once you begin to stabilise yourself in the state of oneness, the likes and dislikes which are causing you so much trouble now will just fade away of their own accord. When there are no likes or dislikes, what is there left in the mind to disturb your peace?

Don't be discouraged by obstacles or the feeling that you are not making any progress. The mind is so enmeshed in illusion it is not capable of determining whether or not it is making any progress along the spiritual path. Just carry on with your meditation. Don't expect immediate results and don't be worried by the lack of them.

*Q: I feel that I am a useless sādḥaka. I feel that I will never have enough detachment or energy to transcend my problems.*

AS: An ignorant person may think that he has many problems or faults, but if he goes to a *jnāni* the *jnāni* will see none of them. He will simply see a person who is unaware of the Self, unaware of the truth. He will not condemn him for this, he will just feel compassion for his ignorance.

When you see that all is your own Self, whom can you condemn, whom will you praise? For whom can you feel any hatred? If you see no defects or faults you remain always at peace, knowing all to be your Self.

It is the nature of the mind to see some things as right and some things as wrong. If you give up all ideas about good and bad, right and wrong, you remain as Self alone. Small babies and *jnānis* are similar in that they don't see right or wrong in anything.

*Q: I feel that I have so many problems only the Guru's grace can help me.*

AS: It is a real blessing if you can find a *jnāni* and have faith in him. If you put some firewood near a fire it will eventually catch

fire and become one with the fire. Without the grace of the Guru, and association with him, it is very difficult to realise the Self.

It is difficult to find out who is a real Guru because Self-realised people often look and behave like ordinary people. Those who are not spiritually mature don't recognise their spiritual greatness. If a grandfather plays with his baby grandchildren, the babies will think that the grandfather is just like them. They will only see him as he really is when they start to grow up.

Babies make mistakes like this because they haven't developed enough critical faculties to distinguish adults from babies. There are many spiritual babies in the world who think that *jñānis* and Gurus are ordinary people just like they are. When the babies start to grow spiritually, they may develop enough spiritual discrimination to find a real Guru and surrender to him. Finding a Guru is the greatest blessing that can happen to a person in this life.

## 11

*Q: Recently, during meditation, I have been feeling that breathing becomes shallower and shallower. It also slows down whenever I stand still. Should I leave this as it is, or should I make an effort to breathe more deeply?*

AS: Are you practising yoga or *prāṇāyāma*? Or self-enquiry? Do you have a Guru?

*Q: I do have a Guru but she's now in the United States. I haven't seen her for three months. I am not practising any prāṇāyāma.*

AS: Are you practising self-enquiry?

*Q: It's called spontaneous meditation.*

AS: What is the method?

*Q: I was told that the best way to meditate is just to sit down and let it happen. Does Swami know Swami Muktananda? I am a follower of his successor, Swami Chitvilasananda.*

AS: When the breath is still the mind is also still. One can watch either the breath or the mind as a *sādhana*. If it is done properly both will begin to subside. But a more effective method is to be aware of the one who is watching the breath or the mind. If we know at all times what it is that is doing the witnessing, we can simply let it all be as it is. If we can be secure in this knowledge

there is no need to direct the meditation in any way. Why? Because in that state we know that nothing which appears, changes or moves can affect us.

It is said that there are many paths to reach the ultimate, and that there are many risks associated with some of these paths. Bhagavan showed us the risk-free path of *ātma vichāra* [self-enquiry] through which we can easily know ourselves. If we learn to hold on to the real Self through the practice of self-enquiry we can learn to live blissfully in this miserable world.

*Q: Isn't it selfish to sit around being blissful when there is so much misery in the world? Shouldn't we help the man who is dying in the road? I mean, obviously, we should help him. You cannot just pretend that the world is not there. In a way it's very real.*

AS: It is not the duty of spiritual aspirants to look at the world and to change the situations in the world. The world is nothing but a big game of *māyā*. If you get entangled in the activities of the world you will find yourself trapped in *māyā*, unable to see yourself and the world as it really is. The world is always changing. Sometimes conditions for some people are favourable. At other times they are not good. There is so much chaos in the world because it is always in a state of flux. But the witness of this changing world—that is, you yourself—is always at peace, never disturbed. Go to that state of witnessing and be peaceful there. We can really do nothing about this world.

*Q: Why is it so necessary to ignore people who so obviously need help of some kind?*

AS: If one becomes stabilised in the Self, humanity is automatically benefited. A person who is stabilised in the Self will not be indifferent to the problems of the world. If problems arise, such a person will act spontaneously and provide the correct solution to each problem.

You are holding onto many beliefs: 'I am a separate human being; the world is separate from me; other people are separate from me; I am an aspirant doing meditation to attain the Self; other people in the world are suffering.' All these concepts are wrong. There is no duality and no separateness. In fact there is no misery or suffering outside your own mind because the whole world is nothing but a projection of your own mind. Your own suffering and the suffering you see around you can be erased easily if you give up all the wrong ideas you have about yourself.

All suffering begins with the notion of duality. As long as this duality-consciousness is strongly fixed in the mind one cannot give any real help to other people. If one realises one's non-dual nature and becomes peaceful within, one becomes a fit instrument to help others.

When one has stabilised in the Self, the inner peace which one experiences at all times flows out to all people. This natural radiation heals and uplifts humanity far more than any amount of physical activity.

The *jnāni* is just like the sun. The sun radiates light and warmth continuously and indiscriminately. The *jnāni* effortlessly radiates his own nature—his love, his peace, his joy—to the whole universe.

Even though the sun is always present, to receive its rays we have to turn towards it. Similarly, if we want spiritual light, we should turn towards a realised being. If one makes a conscious effort to stay in the light of a *jnāni*, the darkness of spiritual ignorance automatically vanishes.

*Q: What is the reason for the spiritual experiences which some devotees seem to have? Are they to help us on the path, or to give us confidence? These experiences of inner light, inner sounds etc., do we need them, or do they just happen because they are natural? Why do some people get these experiences and others not?*

AS: The experiences which come during meditation are the result of one's previous practices. It is not necessary to have such experiences.

'Who is the one who is having all these experiences?' Our attention should be on that only. Experiences come and go but the witness of all experiences always remains unchanged. Our attention should steadily be there.

We should see the one who sees all the experiences. Remember, whatever happens to you can be perceived only through the mind. Remember also that the perceptions of the mind are not real because the perceiver himself is not real. If we always enquire 'To whom is this experience happening?' the false perceiver and the false experiencer will both subside.

The saint Subramania Bharati once wrote: 'If you come to see with clarity that the world is only a projection of the mind, you will transcend all suffering.'

In another of his poems he joked against the mind and against *māyā*:

There are those who have realised the truth; they don't take you [the mind] as substantial. Those who are abiding strongly in the Self—to them you can do nothing. If we realise the non-dual reality, you will have no peace there; you will have to run away. If the dualities of the mind are resolved, where are you? Those brave people who come to that deep conviction and understanding that the body is unreal, what can you do to them? For those who are ready to die, for them the death of this [mind] is nothing.

*Q: Wasn't he involved in politics? I didn't know that he was so interested in spiritual matters.*

AS: Yes, he was involved in politics, but he was also a poet and a philosopher. He once came to see Bhagavan in Virupaksha Cave.

*Q: I have not read any account of their meeting. Did they speak?*

AS: No, he just came and had *darshan*. In another song, written while he was in Pondicherry, he said, 'There is no misery, no misery, no misery. See, all is God; no misery.'

## 12

*Q: Here at Arunachala it seems relatively easy to have spiritual discrimination. In Paris, with our daily activities and so many external influences, it is much more difficult.*

AS: Thoughts such as 'Arunachala is different from Paris,' 'I work in Paris'—these are concepts which arise only after we identify ourselves with the body and take the body to be 'I'. If you accept such ideas you are automatically handicapping yourself.

*Q: Through our practice we feel that we are approaching reality, but we also feel that we have a long way to go.*

AS: You cannot approach reality or be at any distance from it. The Self is never distant from you because you already are that Self.

To get rid of all your false ideas you must generate a firm conviction that this is so. 'I am the Self; I am all; everything is the

Self.' That *mantra* is the most effective and the most powerful tool for this. If you repeat it always, all energy will come to you because you truly are the all-pervasive consciousness.

*Q: Suppose that we give this mantra to a tape recorder. It may repeat it endlessly but it will not become an all-pervasive tape recorder. Is repeating alone enough?*

AS: If you repeat anything constantly and generate enough faith to believe that what you are saying is correct, your mind will eventually become what you are repeating. If you repeat the truth that you are the Self, and if you gain sufficient faith that what you are saying is true, eventually you will become the truth, the Self.

*Q: I can understand that repeating this phrase is beneficial when the mind is active and outward-moving. But should we also repeat it when we are experiencing inner silence?*

AS: If one is always stabilised in the silence, that is the reality. But when the stabilisation is only temporary, is that enough?

*Q: The mantras can take one to a state of inner silence. Once they have achieved this purpose, why should we go on repeating them?*

AS: There are different kinds of silence. If the mind stops in a silence that is similar to deep sleep, you should know that this is not the ultimate silence. If you remain in this state without continuing your meditation, no benefit will come to you. When this state comes it is better to continue your meditation on the Self.

*Q: How can one tell whether one is experiencing that sleep-like silence instead of the true silence?*

AS: If, after coming out of the silence, one immediately takes the body as 'I', one has not been experiencing the true silence. In the pursuit of inner silence, one should not enter *laya* [temporary suspension of all mental faculties].

For example, a man does some work; then he feels tired and takes some rest; afterwards he starts the work again. The silence should not be of this type. That is, if the mind is just temporarily taking some rest, you will not experience the real silence. A complete absence of thoughts does not necessarily mean that one is experiencing the silence of the Self.

If there is a sense of freshness and clarity in the silence, if one's

awareness shines in such a way that one feels joyful and utterly peaceful, this is more likely to be the real silence. If this awareness, this wakefulness, is not there, it is better to continue with *japa* and *dhyāna*.

Let me give you another example: a man meditates in Bhagavan's old hall. He sits there for one hour. Afterwards he thinks to himself, 'I sat and meditated for one hour'. This is not *nishthā* [being established in the Self] because the 'I' was there thinking 'I am sitting; I am meditating'. If you have any awareness that you are sitting or meditating, you are not experiencing the Self, you are experiencing the ego.

*Q: When we don't feel unity or oneness, does this mean that we have not reached the ultimate state?*

AS: In the real, there is no gap between moments of meditation. Meditation is always constant.

*Q: This meditation you speak of, does it consist of mental repetition? Is it a formulation of words such as 'I am the Self, I am consciousness,' or is it a kind of awareness of the Self which is present without words or concepts?*

AS: If you repeat a *mantra* aloud, that is *japa*. If you repeat the same in the mind, you can call that meditation. If one is established in the awareness of immanent consciousness, that is *nishthā* [being established in the Self].

*Q: So if one can remain in nishthā it is not necessary to do japa or meditation?*

AS: In meditation you are never forgetting the Self. Being consciously aware of the Self without thinking about it in any way is *nishthā*. Why repeat 'I am Sundaram, I am Sundaram' if you already have the feeling that you are Sundaram?

In this ultimate state one is neither thinking about the Self nor forgetting the Self. One simply is. If you have this experience, doubts such as 'Should I carry on meditating?' will not arise. In that ultimate state it is impossible for thoughts like this to arise. So, if you come to some peaceful or silent place in your meditation and the thought arises, 'Should I rest in the silence or carry on with my meditation?' you should carry on with your meditation because

this thought alone indicates that you have not established yourself in the Self.

It is not good to think too much about your meditation practice. Just do it and keep on doing it until you have the firm conviction that nothing that appears in the mind has anything to do with the real you. If you pay attention to thoughts and feelings while you meditate and try to use them to evaluate how well or how badly you are meditating, you will never reach the ultimate silence. Instead you will just get bogged down in mental concepts.

Some people are distracting their minds in so many different ways: for example, trying to make distinctions between things like *turiya* [the fourth state] and *turiyātīta* [that which is beyond the fourth]. Reality is very simple: instead of trying to explain it or label it, just be it by giving up all identification with the body and the mind. This is the ultimate *jñāna*. If you follow this path you need not get involved in any mental or philosophical complexities.

People are practising all kinds of *sādhana*s to reach the Self. Some of these methods are hindrances to *jñāna*. Meditation can be another form of bondage if it starts from the assumption that the body and the mind are real. If this idea is not dropped, meditation will merely enhance it.

Realising the Self and never forgetting the Self—that is real *jñāna*.

*Q: That is the difficulty: to remain stabilised in the Self.*

AS: For whom is the difficulty? Don't indulge in such thoughts. Find out who has them.

The saint Tayumanuvar once said, 'Why all these *mahā* yogas?'

You are already the Self. Why don't you remain established in your own natural state, without forgetting it or ceasing to be aware of it? Don't concern yourself with all these *mahā* yogas.

### 13

*Q: Does the jñāni emit some kind of power that attracts devotees, or is it just a part of his destiny that devotees will eventually find him and become his disciples?*

AS: A magnet has the power to attract iron. This Arunachala hill

draws aspirants towards it like a magnet attracts iron filings, and then makes them go round it on foot. It does not say, 'Come and do *pradakshina*'. It doesn't need to. Its power automatically attracts people who want to do *pradakshina*.

One who is realised, who is stabilised in the Self, becomes like a magnet. He draws aspirants towards himself.

Saint Tayumanuvar explains in one of his verses that when a flower blooms it gives out a fragrance which causes bees to come and collect its honey. But he adds that if the flower does not bloom, there will be no fragrance, no honey and no bees.

Bhagavan spoke about this power in *Aksharamanamalai*: 'Just as a magnet attracts iron, O Arunachala, you attracted me and made me one with you.'

[Speaking to some newcomers] Have you read Bhagavan's books? Do you have any doubts about his teachings?

*Q: We have read some of the books about Bhagavan which have been translated into French. We have no doubts about the message they contain.*

AS: If one becomes firmly established in the Self and attains final realisation, all doubts will evaporate, but not before that. Until then doubts will come up again and again.

If the false 'I'—that is, the 'I-am-the-body' idea—does not come to us at all, we can conclude that we have realised the Self.

*Q: Is it possible for ordinary people like us to realise that which is beyond everything?*

AS: To the extent that the mind has become pure, one realises that which is beyond it. If one is totally limited, identified with that I-am-the-body idea, one is very far away from realisation of the Self.

*Q: What is the relationship between the mind which has to be purified and that consciousness into which it finally disappears?*

AS: You can say that the mind is just like an atom of the infinite. When we identify ourselves with the body and the mind, we think we are limited. This identification with the mind hides the Self. If we give up this identification and remain as pure consciousness, the mind merges into consciousness. You then know that the mind is not a separate entity. It arises in consciousness, which is Self,

and again disappears into consciousness without ever becoming separate or apart from it.

Tayumanuvar said:

The mind is like an atom. There is nobody to equal the one who has attained the state wherein the mind has dissolved in its source, because in that state there is no other.

There is nothing mysterious about the Self because no one can deny his own existence. Pure consciousness is always present and always experienced. Nobody can deny the existence of this 'I am' or its continuity in all states. Waking may happen; the dream state may appear and disappear; death may come to the body. All these things may come and go but the 'I am' will remain constant throughout. All these changing states—birth, death, waking, sleeping, dreaming—are just taking place within consciousness. But while these changes are taking place, the pure consciousness always remains, unchanging and unchangeable. So hold onto that and that alone.

'I am that I am': Bhagavan often quoted this teaching from the Bible and said that it summarised the whole of *Vēdānta*. If you ask 'What is God?' it can be said quite truthfully in reply, 'The experience of this "I am" is God'. All of us have this 'I am', this basic sense of existing. This consciousness is the ultimate and only reality.

*Q: There is another biblical statement which is very popular among Christians: 'No man comes to the Father except through me.' How does Swami understand this statement of Jesus?*

AS: When Jesus said 'Except through me' he was speaking of the Self, not the body, but people have misunderstood this.

On another occasion Jesus said, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you'. He did not mean that it is within the body. This 'you' Jesus spoke of is the Self, infinite consciousness.

Although a sage who has stabilised in the Self may use the word 'me', we should not make the mistake of thinking that he is the body. Whenever the *jñāni*, who has become one with the infinite, pure consciousness, says 'me', he is speaking not of the body, the form, but of the one consciousness.

In the absolute, single, formless, immanent consciousness,

where is Jesus or any other *jnāni*? All is one in consciousness. It is impossible to differentiate between people there.

The one who realises this state beyond the mind expresses the truth in his own way. Those who are seeking to understand this truth always try to understand the message through the misleading medium of words. They misinterpret with their minds and misunderstand what the teacher is really trying to say.

Many Christians take that phrase 'No man comes to the Father except through me' to mean through the form of Jesus Christ alone. Because of this interpretation they condemn all other concepts of God and all other religions.

In essence all religions are one. Bhagavan once told me: 'If the ego is destroyed by proper self-enquiry and if the non-dual consciousness is realised, that alone is the truth. Then, in that non-dual consciousness, where are all the different religions? And where are all the different religious masters? All is one in that state.'

*Q: Does Swami understand Jesus Christ to be a jnāni like so many other jnānis, or was he something more than that?*

AS: If the ego is destroyed, only non-dual consciousness remains. There is no higher or lower in that state.

You cannot say that one *jnāni* is in a different state from another. You cannot say that Jesus Christ is better than Bhagavan or vice versa. There is no higher state than that of the *jnāni* and there is no *jnāni* who is superior to any other *jnāni*.

Although the inner state and experience of all *jnānis* is the same, their outer activities differ because each of them has a different destiny to fulfil. Some will become teachers and some will not.

If there is water in a glass it will quench the thirst of one man; if there is water in a big pot it may quench the thirst of thirty or forty people; if there is water in a well it can quench the thirst of all the people in a village or a town. Some spiritual aspirants have done *tapas* only for their own realisation. After realisation they may be able to help a few people. But some *jnānis* have done prolonged *tapas* not only for their own realisation but also to help liberate others. The *jnānis* who have done this kind of *tapas* become world famous masters and have many followers.

## 14

AS: By the grace of Bhagavan I have not had much contact with worldly people. When people come to see me they sit and listen to what I have to say. If they are interested in Bhagavan and his teachings they may stay for a while. If they are not interested they just go away. Not many people come here. A few regular visitors and perhaps one or two new people every week. And when they do come we talk about Bhagavan and his teachings, not about what is going on in the world. For more than forty years I have not bothered to find out what is going on in the world. I don't even know what is going on in Tiruvannamalai.

*Q: Have you never left Palakottu during this time?*

AS: When Bhagavan was still alive I went to the top of the hill and often visited Skandashram. I went for *giri pradakshina* quite often in the 1930s but I came back via Pachaiaimman Koil and Skandashram in order to avoid having to pass through town. I have not even been to the big temple there. In the last few years I have been restricting myself to Palakottu and to occasional walks on the mountain.

I first came to Sri Ramanasramam in 1928. In all the years that have passed since then I have only left Tiruvannamalai twice: once when I ran away to Polur during my first month here, and once for one day when I went to another town to order some lime which was needed for the construction of the dining room. That was more than fifty years ago. I haven't left Tiruvannamalai at all, even for a day, for more than fifty years.

*Q: You have been very lucky. You were able to do your sādhanā in a quiet place with a great Guru. My prārabdha is not like this. I have to live and work in a big city in the West. Is it possible to do proper sādhanā in a city?*

AS: I have never done *sādhanā* in a city, or even visited one, so I can't give you an expert opinion on this. People tell me that the air in cities is very polluted, that there is a lot of noise, and that the spiritual vibrations are very bad. If you have a choice it is better to do *sādhanā* near a Guru or in a sacred place where the vibrations are good. If this is not possible, a place in the country will be better than a place in the city.

Wherever you live, try to avoid associating with worldly people, that is, people who are not doing *sādhana*. Try to find someone who is established in the Self and spend time in his or her company. If you cannot have *satsang* of the formless Self, this is the next best thing. If you are sincere, Bhagavan will arrange all the circumstances of your life in a favourable way. He will put you in the place where you can make the most progress.

*Q: Swami, I have to go back to Europe soon and the prospect is beginning to worry me. I don't feel that I am capable of maintaining awareness of the Self in the middle of a city. Here it is relatively easy. Over there, it is very, very difficult.*

AS: With a little practice you can go to sleep in the middle of a crowd even if the crowd is making a lot of noise. Once you are asleep their talking and gossiping will not affect you. If you are going to live in a noisy or distracting environment you must learn the art of sleeping while you are awake. You must learn how to stay conscious all the time and yet at the same time not be aware of any noises or potential disturbances that are going on around you. Bhagavan sometimes called the experience of the Self 'wakeful sleep'. If you can learn this technique nothing will ever disturb you again.

*Q: We are able to have satsang here. It is very nice, very sweet. When we leave here, how can we get such satsang?*

AS: If it is not your destiny to stay with a *jnāni* you can always try to establish contact with the formless Self. This is the real *satsang*. You say that it is your *prārabdha* to live in a big city. *Prārabdha* only pertains to the activities of the body. No *prārabdha* can prevent you from turning inwards and putting your attention on the Self. This is a freedom which every human being has irrespective of his *prārabdha*. If your *prārabdha* does not give you *satsang* with a *jnāni*, go directly to the source and have *satsang* of the unmanifest Self. This *satsang* is much harder to achieve and maintain, but if you have no other alternatives you must try it.

Small babies live in towns without being affected by the atmosphere or the people there. If you live a pure life and make the right effort you can also reach the state in which the world cannot affect you.

*Q: It will be very difficult. I shall be calling for help very frequently.*

AS: If you have a desire to have *satsang*, or a desire to be always engaged in meditation on the Self, these things will happen. If your desire is strong enough the power of the Self will make all the arrangements for you. It will send you a Guru, or *satsang*, or whatever else you might need. If you are earnestly doing meditation on the Self, everything you need will automatically come to you.

*Q: In the time that I have been in India I feel that I have made some progress. I am starting to notice that my inner attitude towards the world is beginning to change. I think that I am beginning to put some distance between myself and the world.*

AS: You should have the attitude 'There is no outward and no inward. Everything is the Self.' There are no differences at all in the Self.

Bhagavan once said, 'If you can give up all ideas about differences, that alone will be enough'.

*Q: So we should be in the world without letting it impinge on us in any way. We should not regard other people as being different from us and we should not regard them as being good or bad.*

AS: Correct. If a ship is floating on the surface of the ocean it means that the sea water is not penetrating the hull, except perhaps in very small quantities. If a lot of water seeps in, the ship will eventually sink. If it is your destiny to move among many people in the world, try to float among them and don't let any of their worldly thoughts seep into you. As you move through life you can avoid the contamination that comes from worldliness by keeping your attention on the Self. When you identify with the mind, everything in the world is a potential source of contamination. But when you identify with the Self, everything becomes pure because you are aware of it only as an appearance in the Self.

*Q: You sometimes say that we should avoid bad company. That is not always possible. If one is working one has to mix with all kinds of people. One can't always avoid them.*

AS: In such situations one should take the attitude of someone who is acting in a drama. Outwardly one should do whatever

actions are necessary, but inwardly, one should always be aware of the centre, the consciousness which makes itself known to us as the feeling 'I am'.

I say avoid 'bad company' but ultimately bad company is just a part of the mind. There is no bad company in the Self. While you are still trying to disentangle yourself from the mind it will be helpful for you to avoid bad company. Whenever it is not possible, make an extra effort to withdraw into the Self. If you can establish yourself there, the currents from other people's minds cannot affect you. If you do have to mix with unspiritual people, don't make any judgements about them. Don't think 'This is a bad person,' or 'I don't like this person'. The less you identify with the mind when you are near such people the better.

*Q: I feel certain that I will succumb to māyā as soon as I get home. I don't feel very optimistic about my spiritual future.*

AS: If there is no mind there is no world, no *māyā* and nothing other than yourself. *Māyā* is ego, ego is mind, and the mind is everything you can think of or perceive. To get away from the mind, this ego, this *māyā*, you have to stop getting entangled in thoughts. Be like the axle of a wheel. Let the wheel turn around you, but don't move yourself. The axle stays without movement even if the wheels are spinning very fast. If you establish yourself in the utter stillness of the Self you come to understand that it is mental movement that makes *māyā*. When you remain as Self, in complete stillness, no *māyā* is created.

Another example: be like a big tree. When the wind comes the branches and leaves are shaken but the trunk remains stationary. If you live in the mind you are always being tossed around like branches and twigs in a strong wind. The less you identify with the mind, the less movement there is. When you are aware of yourself as consciousness alone, with no trace of the mind being present, there is no movement at all, only unbroken peace and absolute stillness.

*Q: Swami, you often say that we should avoid bad acts. What exactly do you mean by a 'bad act'?*

AS: In a general sense, anything which causes harm to other beings is a bad act. But one could also say that any act that keeps your attention away from the Self is a bad act. Identifying with the

body is the primal bad act because it is the source of all other bad acts.

## 15

*Q: Bhagavan has said: 'Always be aware of the presence of the Self.' Is this presence the feeling 'I am', which for me is now mixed with my personal 'I', or is it the real 'I'?*

AS: Bhagavan speaks of this 'I am' as something which is present here and now. It has nothing to do with the personal 'I'. In that 'I am' there is no past and no future. In *Kaivalya Navanītam* it is said:

The *jīvanmukta* who is established in this 'I am' is not bothered about the past which is already gone, and is also not bothered about the future which is uncertain. Whatever comes to him in the present, he just enjoys that. Even if the sun is transformed into a moon or a dead body which had gone to the cremation ground comes back to life, still he will not see these things as miraculous.

The personal 'I' makes judgements about good and bad, right and wrong. It is perpetually enmeshed in dualities. The *jīvanmukta*, who is only ever aware of himself as 'I am', has transcended all duality. He sees no right and wrong. He remains as the witness of all happenings without judging them and without identifying with them in any way.

*Q: When I keep the mind on this feeling of 'I am', must I be relaxed and quiet? Should I see what is happening, without interfering, or should I be observing, scrutinising, comparing, etc.?*

AS: It is enough if you can simply relax in this 'I am'. Whatever happens in this 'I am', this consciousness, just be indifferent to it. You are the consciousness itself, not the thoughts and ideas that appear in it. Many things both good and bad are going on in this world. We don't bother about most of them because we think, 'These things are happening to somebody else and not to me'. In the same way, be the consciousness 'I am' and be indifferent to the various things that come and go in your mind. If you identify with thoughts, judge them, compare them, worry about them, try to

suppress them, or get involved with them in any way, they will cause you trouble. Instead, be utterly indifferent to them. If you don't pay them any attention, they can never adversely affect you.

*Q: I have heard Swami say on many occasions that the sattva guna is one with the Self. But many saints and scriptures say that once you are established in sattva guna, even this should be rejected because it is not the final state.*

AS: One verse in *Kaivalya Navanītam* says: 'Pure *sattva* is the reality. If you stop identifying with *rajōguna* and *tamōguna*, both the world and the mind will fall away.'

One can say that the *jñāni* is *suddha sattva* [pure *sattva*]. This is just another term for the Self.

*Q: If the jñāni is established in sattva guna and sattva guna is the Self, what is the meaning of the term trigunātīta [beyond the three gunas]?*

AS: Nothing is really separate from you. Even the things that the Guru tells you to give up—such as the three *gunas* and *māyā*—are ultimately part of you. It is all a matter of perspective. If you cannot stand back from the three *gunas* and watch their interplay from a safe distance, they will catch you and cause you trouble. If you sink deep into the Self and establish yourself there, they will not affect you. The depths of the ocean are not affected by the waves on the surface, however violent they may be. The water in the waves is the same as the water in the depths, but if you stay on the surface you will be constantly tossed around by the waves.

The waves are only a tiny part of the ocean; they are its outer form. Similarly, in the vast, limitless ocean of formless consciousness, names, forms and *gunas* are the tiny surface ripples. They are all manifestations of the one consciousness and inseparable from it. If you want to escape the surface turbulence you can sink deep into the formless consciousness and abide there. If you can learn to stay there you can be aware of the names, forms and *gunas* from a great distance without being troubled or affected by them. From the still depths of the Self you will not see the names and forms as separate things, you will be aware of them as being part of your Self. You will acknowledge them as distant ripples in your own beingness.

If you can establish yourself in the unmoving depths of the

formless Self you are *trigunātīta*, beyond the three *gunas*, even though the *gunas* form an inseparable part of the consciousness which is your real nature.

Consciousness is both with and without form. One can say the same about both God and the *jnāni*. Consciousness contains within itself all names, forms and *gunas*, but the *jnāni*, who has discovered that his real nature is consciousness alone, has transcended them all.

*Q: The jnāni appears to us to have a form. Do the gunas affect the functioning of this form?*

AS: The *jnāni* does not regard himself as having a form, he only regards himself as the Self. If we limit Bhagavan to a form, that is our mistake not his. The form we mistakenly regard as Bhagavan may appear to be governed by the activities of the *gunas*, but from Bhagavan's point of view there is no form at all, there is only the Self. So long as we identify ourselves and Bhagavan with particular forms, we cannot be aware of him as he really is.

Bhagavan once said to me, 'All forms are God and all activities are His'. This does not mean that each separate form is a manifestation of God because in the Self there is no such thing as separateness. All people, all things, and the *gunas* which cause them to appear to react with each other, are just inseparable appearances in the indivisible and unmanifest Self.

*Q: Swami, is it good to go on fasts?*

AS: I once asked Bhagavan what food a *sādhaka* should take.

He replied, 'If you put too much food in the stomach your energy and your ability to remain aware of consciousness will diminish. But if the amount of food in the stomach is less, your awareness will be good.'

It is not necessary to keep the stomach completely empty. Small quantities of sattvic food are best if you want to meditate well.

There is a passage in the spinal cord no thicker than a thread. Through this channel light passes up and goes through the *sushumnā* [a channel in the subtle body]. If you put too much food in the stomach, this light is covered.

*Q: Swami kept mauna [silence] for at least a year in the 1940s. In those days it must have been very peaceful and quiet here. Nowadays the area is filled with the noise of loudspeakers, buses, trucks, radios, etc. I feel that I would also like to keep mauna for some time. But is there any point in keeping silent when there is so much noise around?*

AS: *Mauna* means inner silence, not outer silence. If there are a lot of noises and disturbances outside, we should take them as manifestations of God. If we take the attitude that they are disturbances, we are resisting what is. This will only create anxiety within us. If we see all that is as divine, nothing will ever disturb us.

You should not make judgements about the world. You are thinking, 'A quiet environment is good; a noisy one is bad'. If you have thoughts like these you will inevitably get caught up in the workings of the mind. There is nothing wrong with the world or with the environment you live in. The only defects are in the mind which is looking at the world. If you change the outlook of the mind, the world automatically changes. Alternatively, you can give your whole mind to God.

The saint Jnanasambandar said, 'There is a way that we can live happily in this miserable world. That way is to give our minds to God.'

Bhagavan said: 'Surrender your mind to God and see all forms as God. Have impartial love towards all beings. One who lives like this, he alone can be happy.'

## 16

*Q: Is it true that to realise the Self I should constantly hold on to the one who is searching? Should I always be aware of this person who is seeking the Self?*

AS: You need not hold on to the person who is searching. If you see that the one who is searching is the same as the one whose mind is wandering; if you see that both are false, you are already awakened. When you light a lamp, darkness ceases to exist. When you become aware of yourself as Self, the darkness of 'other than Self' disappears.

*Q: It is so difficult to avoid getting entangled in the mind. Staying detached from thoughts is like trying to stop the tide from coming in. Waves of new thoughts wash away the detached observer every few seconds.*

AS: Self-enquiry must be done repeatedly and steadily. The wandering mind slowly loses its energy when it is subjected to constant scrutiny. The mind derives all its energy from the attention you give to thoughts and emotions. If you refuse to give them any attention and instead challenge each thought as soon as it appears, sooner or later your attention will stop going out to all your stray thoughts. When the attractiveness of transient thoughts diminishes to the point where you no longer feel obliged to hold on to them whenever they appear, you will be able to rest quietly in the experience of your real nature without being distracted.

*Q: We are accustomed to seeing a world of many separate objects. How can we change our vision so that we see only the Self everywhere?*

AS: If you repeatedly shift your attention to the all-pervasive consciousness within you, this habit of seeing the many will gradually disappear. You see multiplicity only because you give attention to that habit. Instead, right now, withdraw your energy from that habit and go the other way towards your real Self. By steadily abiding in the Self you accumulate the energy to resist the illusion of multiplicity. As you continue to immerse yourself in pure consciousness, the habit of seeing the one as many will decrease until it slowly disappears.

*Q: The disappearance of 'otherness' happens at the same time as the disappearance of the ego. Is that correct?*

AS: Yes.

*Q: I have noticed that when one has a strong ego, the people nearby also seem to have strong egos. When we begin to become detached from the body and the mind, we don't seem to notice the emanations from other people.*

AS: One who has eliminated his ego sees others as part of himself, just as arms, legs, feet etc. are part of one body. All is one.

Manikkavachagar sang, 'You are one and nobody is apart from you'.

The *jnāni* does not see other people, he only sees the Self. The spiritual power that is present in and near such people helps other people to lose their imperfect vision. That is why *satsang* is so important and so useful.

Bhagavan once said, 'The *jnānis* are the only pure people. Others are polluted by their egos. Getting the association of *jnānis* is very important for people who want to make spiritual progress.'

*Q: Does satsang mean 'association with jnānis' or can it also mean 'association with good people'?*

AS: The real *sat*, which is being, is within you. You associate with it and get *satsang* every time you turn your attention towards it. You do not need a *jnāni* for such *satsang*. You can get it anywhere. On the other hand, worldly people who are living near *jnānis* are often not getting *satsang* because they are not tuning in to the *jnāni's sat*.

Some people who live near saints are just like little insects called 'unni' which live on the udders of cows. They drink the blood there instead of the milk. Some people who were physically associated with Bhagavan ignored his teachings and failed to make contact with the grace he was radiating. They worked and ate at the ashram, but they got little benefit from being there. These people were not having *satsang*, they were just human unni.

There was a group of brahmins who were associated with Bhagavan who did not subscribe to the advaitic view. 'All is *Brahman*. All is the Self.' In those days we used to read a lot from the *Ribhu Gītā*, a text which repeatedly says 'All is *Brahman*'. These brahmins refused to join in because they didn't agree with the philosophy.

'Where is this *Brahman* you are talking about?' they would say. 'How can it be everything? How can you go on chanting "All is *Brahman*" when that is not your experience? Maybe these teachings are useful for people like Bhagavan, but why should people like us parrot these statements endlessly?'

Bhagavan himself encouraged us to recite this text regularly. He said that constant and frequent repetition led to *samādhi*. In giving us this instruction Bhagavan was giving us a method of experiencing some of the *sat* that was his real nature. In effect he

was offering us a highly effective form of *satsang*. But these brahmins didn't want it. They wanted instead to complain about the contents of the book. When such people wilfully turn down a method of associating with Bhagavan's *sat*, how can it be said that they are having his *satsang*?

*Q: Even if such people didn't understand Bhagavan's teachings and didn't try to follow them, didn't they get a little benefit just from being near him? Perhaps their physical association with Bhagavan will bear fruit in some future life.*

AS: Yes, this is true. In *Yōga Vāsishṭa* it is said that one who gets association with a *jñāni* will gain *mukti* in only four or five lifetimes. These people were associated with Bhagavan physically and were made aware of his teachings, even if they didn't believe or practise them. These teachings are like seeds which will begin to sprout when the time and the circumstances are right.

*Q: It is said that saints like Guru Nanak, Kabir and others were very much against idol worship. Bhagavan has explained that such worship is useful for some people at a certain stage of their sādhanā. I have read that a true jñāni will never criticise anything. Does this mean that these saints were not jñānis? Or is it that their followers didn't understand their teachings correctly?*

AS: There is no doubt that Guru Nanak and Kabir were *jñānis*.

If *mumukshus* [people who want Self-realisation] who are striving hard for liberation hold onto a form of God, it often happens that their progress towards the truth is completely stopped. So, out of compassion for such beings, the saints criticised idol worship.

Realised persons do not make critical judgements about anything. If they seem, outwardly, to criticise anything, it is only for the good of others. Their own inner experience is that there is no 'good' or 'bad'.

If one is still identified with the body, there is nothing wrong with doing idol worship. Those people who are centered in the body, who take this body to be 'I', are filled with thoughts of God when they do external worship. They become aware of some power which is greater than their little, limited selves. One should not criticise any activity which turns the minds of ordinary people towards an awareness of God.

The same Bhagavan who admitted that idol worship is good for some people told me, 'You need not do any external worship'.

Many years later he told me that I should not even come to see him. He didn't give a reason but I suspect that he wanted me to give up my attachment to his external form.

He told me, 'Hold onto the Self. If you can do that you need no other practice. This is the ultimate and final *sādhana*.'

➤ Bhagavan has written in one of his verses [*Ulladu Nārpadu* v. 4]: 'If you have a form, then God also has a form; if you have no form, then God also has no form.' If you can see all forms as a manifestation of God, then how can you say that God has no forms? In *Ribhu Gītā* it says 'All forms are *Brahman*'.

*Q: I have read somewhere: 'All forms are His forms yet He has no form.'*

AS: Yes. The ocean has many waves on it giving it an outer form, but water itself is formless. Manikkavachagar has sung: 'God is both darkness and light; He is both male and female; He is both false and real; He is everything.'

## 17

*Q: I recently received a letter from a friend. As I read it I felt very happy. My mind was excited. Afterwards I felt, 'There is some attachment to this person. My love is not equal for everyone.'*

AS: Loving or liking one particular person is not good. Feel love towards everyone. That is desirelessness.

*Q: I have a good friend who has been in prison for ten years. He is very desperate. Is there anything I can do to help him?*

AS: The whole universe is run by God. We should put all burdens at His feet. Leave the business of running the world to God. God has decided what actions our bodies will perform in this world. It is God's will that your friend's body is in prison. But God does not bind people's minds. They are always free to turn to Him. They can always turn to the Self and disassociate themselves from the activities of the body.

If you want to help your friend, send him some of Bhagavan's books. He will then have the possibility of knowing about his own

Self. If he understands them he can try to attain inner freedom even though his body is imprisoned. He is probably suffering because his body has been put in jail. If he comes to understand a little about his real nature by reading the teachings of Bhagavan, he can come to understand that only his body is in jail. Nobody can put the Self in jail. If he learns to identify with his real Self he will be more free than his jailors.

If we are ignorant of the Self the result is only misery and suffering. Your friend is probably feeling miserable because he thinks that he has been put in jail. Those who are outside the jail are mostly just as miserable because they limit themselves by identifying with the body. The outside people all imprison themselves in their bodies by wrongly identifying with them. People who are ignorant of the Self lead a miserable life whether they are inside or outside jail.

Aurobindo did a lot of *sāadhanā* in jail and so did Gandhi. If you have the right attitude, jail can be a very congenial place in which to do your meditation.

*Q: It takes a lot of effort to get stabilised in the Self. I am not sure if my friend is capable of making the effort.*

AS: Yes, a great effort is needed. When wood is wet it will not catch fire immediately. It must be first dried in the sun. When our minds have been dried by constant meditation, a single spark from the Self will ignite them.

Some people undergo much suffering because of their past sinful *karma*. This suffering purifies the mind to some extent in the same way that sunlight dries out wet wood. After the minds have been purified to some extent they become more fit for *jnāna*.

God often creates a lot of difficulties for us merely to divert our attention from the world and turn it to Him.

When we feel pain and frustration we begin to ask, 'What can we do that will help us to get rid of this suffering?'

Often we turn to God for help. The sufferings in this world are often a gift from God. It is through the gate of misery and suffering that we can enter the kingdom of God.

Suffering only appears to exist because we identify with the body and the mind. In reality there is no misery and no suffering.

Bhagavan used to say, 'There is nothing wrong with God's creation. Misery and suffering only exist in the mind.'

If we suffer because of the wrong ideas we have about ourselves, we can learn to transcend suffering by giving up these ideas or by turning to God. Suffering gives us the impetus to escape from our self-limiting ignorance. If God did not send these gifts of suffering and misery, many people would be content to live their whole lives alienated from God and ignorant of their true nature.

*Q: Does the Guru's grace burn up karma? Can the Guru take away some of our past bad karma?*

AS: I served Bhagavan for many years. By doing a lot of service to Bhagavan with all my heart and my full mind, the *karmas* of my previous lives were erased easily. It was all through his grace. When this period was over Bhagavan told me, 'Your *karmas* are finished'. I did not expect Bhagavan to give me such a great blessing.

Finding a great Guru like Bhagavan depends on one's *karma*. One cannot hope to find such a Guru unless one has done *tapas* in previous lives.

The path of *jnāna* is for those who only have a little *karma* left. Those who still have many *karmas* to undergo cannot follow the path of *jnāna* successfully because they don't have the capacity to be still and quiet. Only those who have learned how to be still can abide in the Self.

If one is lucky enough to find a Guru like Bhagavan one should stay with him and serve him wholeheartedly. Many people came to Bhagavan, did *sēvā* [service], and said that they wanted Self-realisation. After some time many of these people forgot the purpose for which they came to Bhagavan. They started dabbling in ashram politics and soon lost their desire for Self-realisation. Other people had a few good experiences and then left, thinking that they had nothing more to learn.

If you have the opportunity to stay with a Guru you should not waste your good fortune by leaving him or by indulging in worldly activities in his vicinity.

*Q: I have read that if one meditates intensively enough, the current of meditation continues throughout the night. Just before I go to sleep at night I repeat to myself, 'I am not the body, I am not the*

*mind, I am the immanent Self. Will that have any effect? Will it work during the night?*

AS: What you are doing is very good. If you go to sleep with that strong conviction uppermost in your mind, it will work on the mind while you are asleep. If this idea is present while you sleep, the next morning this thought will come up of its own accord as the first thought of the day.

*Q: Swami frequently says that we should not identify with the body. If I reject the idea that this is my body, what other instrument can I use to realise the Self? Don't I need to identify with the body in some way in order to use it to do sādhanā?*

AS: You are wearing a shirt. Does this mean that you must take this shirt to be yourself? You wear a shirt to keep warm but you don't say, 'I am a shirt'. You can use the body as an instrument to realise the Self without thinking, 'I am the body'. Just regard the body as a helpful tool.

*Q: I am puzzled by some aspects of this teaching. There is no doubt that Bhagavan was realised, but in that state he was still aware of his body. When Bhagavan was ill he didn't say, 'I have pain,' he said, 'It has pain'. Since he had awareness of that pain in the body he must still have been a little identified with it.*

AS: Even when the body was experiencing pain, Bhagavan was beyond it. He was not affected by anything that was happening to the body.

*Q: He was beyond in the sense that he was not concerned or troubled by it, but he was still aware that the body was experiencing pain.*

AS: There was an awareness of pain but there was no feeling, 'This is my body; I have pain'. You can be aware of birds flying in and out of a tree without thinking, 'I am this tree, these birds are mine'. Similarly, Bhagavan could be aware of bodily sensations without thinking, 'I am this body; this pain is mine'. Bhagavan wore a body in the same way that other people wear a *dhōti*.

You are attaching too much importance to bodies, both Bhagavan's and your own. It is possible to exist without being

aware of the body in any way. Your experience in deep sleep should satisfy you that this is possible. Your questions and doubts are all coming from the body-mind level, from the idea that you are a body and a person. You can find out what the relationship between the body and the Self is by experiencing the Self as it really is. But to get that experience you must first be willing to give up the idea that you are a body and a person. You will never have the experience while you are still clinging to erroneous ideas about the body. You will not resolve your doubts about the body by discussing them, you will only resolve them by giving them up.

*Q: What is the relationship between the real 'I' and the false 'I'? What is the connection between them?*

AS: How can there be any connection or relationship between that which alone exists and something which never at any time had any existence outside your mind? The Self alone exists. It has no relationships with or connections to anything because there is nothing separate from it to have a relationship with. The false 'I' has no reality; it is just an erroneous belief. When you finally stop believing that you are a person inhabiting a body you become aware of what you really are.

If someone who is cross-eyed looks at the top of Arunachala he would see two peaks instead of one. If such a person were not aware that he had defective vision he might ask, 'What is the relationship between the two peaks? How can I build a bridge between them?' There is only one proper answer to give to a person like this.

'Your vision is defective. If you get your eyesight corrected you will see that there is only one peak. You will see that the second peak never existed outside your mind.'

Your spiritual vision is defective. It is making you see objects instead of the one Self. You can cure this defect by establishing yourself in the Self. The *nishtā* is not aware of multiplicity, he is only aware of the one Self.

*Q: I am observing how the teaching is going on inside. This morning, when I awoke, my first thought was, 'I take shelter at the feet of Bhagavan'. But then immediately a new thought arose: 'Who*

*is taking shelter?’ I think that this new attitude is a consequence of listening to Swami’s teachings.*

AS: Your questioning is correct.

*Q: I feel that there is some alertness inside.*

AS: If you enquire into the origin of a thought as soon as it appears, your attention is diverted towards the Self. The Self is always alert. That is its nature.

*Q: I am very accustomed to catch hold of something such as Bhagavan’s form. It is part of my search for security. Now I can see that the desire for security is leaving me.*

AS: You catch hold of the real Bhagavan strongly only when you give up all supports. By giving up your supports you are not giving up your security, you are becoming more secure in the real Bhagavan.

Even the image, the form of Bhagavan, is *māyā*. He resides within us as the Self. That is the real Bhagavan. The saint Manikkavachagar, after receiving the blessings of Siva, sang a song in which he complimented Siva by calling him a *māyāvādin* [one who propounds the doctrine of *māyā*]. We must learn the truth about *māyā* from a Guru and then utilise his grace to transcend it.

Chinnaswami once tried to frighten me by telling me: ‘Don’t believe what Bhagavan tells you, he is a *māyāvādin*. He will delude you and cheat you.’

I replied, ‘He may cheat this body and mind, but in doing so he will show me the Self’.

In my early years here I once went onto the hill to see the Mango Tree Cave where Bhagavan used to live. Near it a *sādhū* with long matted hair was sitting in *padmāsana*. I thought that he was a fake *sādhū* so I ignored him and went on into the cave.

When I came out and walked past him he angrily exclaimed, ‘You have walked in front of me without doing *namaskāram*! I will curse you for this! You will be destroyed!’

I laughed at him and said, ‘I came to Arunachala because I wanted to be destroyed. May your curse come true because I want my ego to be destroyed!’

The *sādhū* was very unhappy when he saw that I was completely unafraid of him.

*Q: The other day Swami was saying that someone may be living here at the foot of Arunachala, but if that person's mind is not here, he will gain nothing by staying here. The Arunāchala Purānam and Bhagavan both say that just the thought of Arunachala can take one to mōksha. How should one understand these statements in the light of what Swami said?*

AS: 'Those who think of Arunachala will gain *mukti*' – the scriptures say this. But even though one may stay at Arunachala, one may not feel any devotion towards this hill. One may not regard it as God. Many people are living here without giving more than a passing thought to the mountain. How can we conclude that such people are living in Arunachala? The truth is, one is where one's mind is.

If one is living here but the whole of one's mind is thinking of another place, one is really in that other place. There is a story which Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to tell.

Once two friends went to listen to a lecture on the *Bhāgavatam*.

As they were going there one of them thought, 'What is there in this *Bhāgavatam*? Let me go instead to a prostitute and enjoy a little happiness.'

He went to the house of the prostitute while his friend went to listen to the lecture. While he was lying with the prostitute the first man began to feel a little guilty about what he had done.

He thought to himself, 'How good it would be to use this human life to listen to stories of the Lord and to meditate on the Lord. He began to think wistfully about some of the stories from the *Bhāgavatam* that he had heard before. Because of these feelings, his mind was with the *Bhāgavatam* even though his body was with the prostitute.

The other man who had gone to listen to the *Bhāgavatam* was thinking about what his friend might be doing with the prostitute.

He thought to himself, 'My friend must be having a lot more fun than I am'.

His body was present at the talk but his mind was not on the *Bhāgavatam*. It was with the prostitute. The one who was with the prostitute got the *punya* of listening to the *Bhāgavatam*. The other man, even though he was physically present at the talk, incurred the sin of having been with the prostitute.

*Q: So when Bhagavan said, 'The thought of Arunachala gives mukti,' he did not mean a single stray thought, he meant that one should keep the mind constantly on Arunachala?*

AS: There is a verse in *Aksharamanamālai*: 'O Arunachala! As I thought of you and so got caught in the web of your grace, you, like a spider, held me tight and consumed me.'

If you think of Arunachala just once, Arunachala responds by trying to draw you into itself. It does this by making you think about itself more and more. When the thoughts are strong and continuous, it makes you surrender completely. Like a spider, it then pulls you into its web and ultimately destroys you. So, in the case of ripe devotees, it is possible to say that a single thought of Arunachala can lead, step by step, to liberation.

*Q: The connection with Arunachala, is it in the mind or only in the heart?*

AS: The first verse of *Aksharamanamālai* has two meanings:

- 1) O Arunachala! You root out the ego of those who think of you in the Heart.
- 2) O Arunachala! You root out the ego of those who think 'Arunachala I am'.

So, one can have a connection in both the mind and the Heart. The Heart connection is of course superior since that is the real Arunachala.

*Q: Some people have no devotion towards Arunachala. They just live and work here. Does the power that is radiating from the mountain do them any good?*

AS: You can take as much water from the ocean as you are capable of carrying, but if you don't bother to go down to the shore with a pot you get nothing at all. Arunachala only gives its grace to those who have some kind of vessel to receive it in. If the mind thinks about Arunachala in a loving way, it automatically creates a space within itself which can receive a little of the mountain's grace.

Many people do *pradakshina* of this Arunachala hill. They have many desires; they want to achieve many things. In due course they may get what they desire. But if you do *giri pradakshina* as a *sādhana* for obtaining knowledge of the Self, then you will get that.

Most people have many desires which they want to fulfil. But some rare people tell God: 'I want nothing. Make me desireless, that is my only desire.' Such a one will be a fit instrument to receive grace.

There is a verse in *Kaivalya Navanītam*:

If you go near a tree you will get its shade; if you go near a fire you will be relieved of coldness; if you go to the river and drink, your thirst will be quenched; if you go near God you will get His grace. If you do not go near and do not receive His grace, is it the fault of God?

The one who gets the most grace is the one who is completely desireless. Such a person will have no desire even for *mōksha*.

*Q: How effective is pradakshina of Arunachala? Is it as good as meditating on the Self?*

AS: Arunachala radiates the grace of the Self. If you walk around it with reverence, keeping your mind quiet or thinking of the Self, you are having *satsang* of the Self. There is a great spiritual power emanating from Arunachala. You can feel it if you approach the mountain with humbleness, with reverence, and with a quiet mind. If one does *pradakshina* of Arunachala with the right attitude, both the mind and the body are purified. If you feel like doing *pradakshina*, then go. Meditate while you walk. And if, at other times, you feel like sitting in meditation, do that. Both are the same if they are done correctly and attentively. At all times, whatever the body may be doing, one should keep a steady awareness of the Self. The main point of both *pradakshina* and meditation is to give up the identification with the body, to lose the I-am-the-body idea.

*Q: I feel that Arunachala is like a mother who will go with me everywhere, even when I am in another country.*

AS: Arunachala does not go anywhere. Arunachala is the Self, and the Self neither comes nor goes. The word *achala* in Sanskrit means 'unmoving'.

*Q: There is a verse in Arunāchala Māhātmyam which says that all those who live within a thirty-mile radius of Arunachala attain*

*liberation without any effort or initiation.<sup>7</sup> What does Swami think of this verse?*

AS: For liberation there must be continuous remembrance of Arunachala. One must also have faith in Arunachala and surrender to it. Arunachala is pure consciousness; it is not an inert lump of rock. If you have faith that Arunachala is a Guru who will guide you, it will respond with the appropriate guidance. But to get this guidance one must surrender to the mountain and have strong faith in it.

Arunachala is like a fire; if you come near it you may get warm or even burnt. But if you are wearing insulation, even though you are physically near, you may not feel the fire.

*Q: I feel a strong attachment to Arunachala. I also feel a need for solitude and quietness. I don't know how I could ever live away from here, out in the world again.*

AS: Attachments and desires generally produce bondage. But a desire to stay here at Arunachala is a good desire and may be encouraged. It is very good to be attached to Arunachala because Arunachala is the Self. When you think about Arunachala you are turning the mind towards the Self.

## 19

*Q: Most days I follow the practice 'Who am I?'. I try to feel the presence of 'I am' within me. But sometimes I just like to feel that I am somehow sitting in the presence of Bhagavan. Sometimes when I look at his picture it gets filled with light. When I see Bhagavan like this I always feel very peaceful and joyful. I don't ask anything of Bhagavan on these occasions. I just like to sit and bask in his presence.*

*Sometimes I feel the need to love and be loved. At these times I feel that there is something dry and unemotional about self-enquiry.*

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<sup>7</sup> 'I, the Lord, ordain that those who reside within three *yojanās* [about thirty miles] of this place [Arunachala] shall attain union which removes bondage even in the absence of initiation etc.' This is one of the seven verses which Ramana Maharshi translated from Sanskrit into Tamil. See *Five Hymns to Sri Arunāchala*, p. 20.

*Even so, I follow the path of self-enquiry most of the time. It is only occasionally that I have these bhakti phases. When they are over I go back to doing self-enquiry with more vigour and I seem to get better results. Because of this I often stop doing self-enquiry and look at Bhagavan's picture. At these times it gives me great pleasure to imagine that I am sitting in front of the real Bhagavan. What does Swami think of this attitude and this practice?*

AS: One must keep one's attention on the Self if one wants to make progress on the spiritual path. But since Bhagavan is also the Self, you can also make progress by thinking of him. It is good to feel love and devotion towards Bhagavan. The more we love him, the more his grace flows to us in return.

*Q: I wanted to know because sometimes I feel as if I am looking at the real physical form of Bhagavan. I feel very peaceful at these times. I am not sure if I ought to indulge in these states.*

AS: When I used to look at Bhagavan's picture he seemed to be saying to me, 'I went beyond this body and established myself as consciousness. Now you try and do the same.'

Bhagavan is the Self. If you concentrate on his image he will call you towards him. He will try to pull you towards the real Self.

*Q: Sometimes I feel like a child. I feel I am holding Bhagavan's hand. I also feel that he is sheltering and protecting me. It is a strange child-like feeling of being afraid of everything and everyone except Bhagavan.*

AS: Having love for Bhagavan and having love for one's own Self are the same. If we have devotion and love towards the form of Bhagavan and surrender to him, he will take us towards the reality.

One cannot see the Self, consciousness, because it is not an object that can be perceived. But we can keep our attention on the Self indirectly by having *darshan* of Bhagavan's form.

*Q: I feel that the bhakti path is an effortless way. When I enquire 'Who am I?' I feel that I must make a great effort to make the mind subside. The bhakti path seems to be more sweet, more joyful and more effortless.*

AS: It is always good to worship the Guru, but abiding in the Guru's teachings is far better. You can follow the *bhakti* path if

you want to but you should remember that it is almost impossible for the devotee to judge whether he is making progress or not. You should not jump to the conclusion that you are not making progress with your self-enquiry simply because you find it hard to do. And you should not think that you will make more progress as a *bhakta* simply because you find it easy to generate joyful states of mind.

The same consciousness which is within you and within Bhagavan's form is within all other forms. We must learn to contact this consciousness by being aware of it at all times.

*Q: I know that Bhagavan is within all forms but sometimes I feel that it is easier to feel his grace by concentrating on an image of him. Self-enquiry is such hard work. One rarely feels blissful or peaceful doing it. Sometimes I feel like treating myself to a little bliss by looking at Bhagavan's picture for a while.*

AS: There is nothing wrong with looking at Bhagavan's picture. It is a very good practice. But you should not get sidetracked from your main objective which is establishing yourself as consciousness. Don't get attached to states of bliss or give them priority over the quest for the Self. If you become attached to peaceful or blissful states you may lose interest in your main quest. It is good to feel blissful and peaceful but don't indulge yourself in these states at the expense of self-enquiry. If you realise the inner Self, if you realise that there is not an atom which is apart from the Self, you will experience the real peace and bliss of the Self. You will *be* the peace and bliss rather than being the experiencer of it. If you enjoy temporary states of peace and bliss in the mind, the experiencer of that peace and bliss will not want to subside into the Self and disappear.

Don't get attached to mental peace. Go beyond it to the real peace which comes from being the Self.

*Q: I think I indulge in these bhakti interludes because I have a great craving for love. Maybe I am giving love only because I want more back in return.*

AS: In the state of Self, real love is always present. But when love is limited or directed to one person it becomes desire. This kind of love creates suffering not happiness. If you realise the Self and love all equally, that is wisdom.

*Q: But is it legitimate to direct one's love towards a realised person?*

AS: Yes. If you love a realised being you will eventually find that you can generate love for all people equally.

During the *Dīpam* festival, the annual ten-day festival which is celebrated here, devotees come from all over South India to worship an image of Arunachala-Siva. This image is paraded through the streets in a chariot. The people who worship in this way have a very limited concept of God. The God which is in the temple, the chariot, and all the people who are watching the procession—all of them are manifestations of God. You must cultivate the inner vision that sees everything as the Self. It is sometimes hard to do this if you restrict God to a particular form.

Bhagavan once said that he was conscious of the passage of time only on three days of the year: the last day of this *Dīpam* festival, *Mahāpūjā* day [the anniversary of his mother's death] and his own *jayanti* day. Many people used to come and see Bhagavan on these three days. They were the busiest days of the year at the ashram. At other times there were no big crowds. The *jnāni* is rarely aware of the passage of time because the concept of time belongs to the mind and not to the Self.

*Q: Sometimes when I sit here I feel like a child on holiday. I feel very happy because it seems easy to be aware of the Self in a place like this. I always feel very joyful here. Should I be making some sort of effort while I am sitting here, or should I just relax and enjoy the benefit of satsang?*

AS: There is a Tamil verse:

The seeker who wishes to realise the truth should walk in the path shown by the *sāstras* and he should walk behind the wise ones. By walking behind the wise ones, *māyā* gives up its hold. Discard *māyā* by acquiring discrimination. If you discard *māyā*, your births and deaths are finished.

By having *satsang* we can easily transcend *māyā*. Now, listening to this talk, our minds are attuned to the Self. That is why you are feeling so joyful. When the mind is totally attuned to the Self, there is no possibility of thinking about the non-Self.

*Q: [Asked by a young couple from Australia] Is brahmacharya necessary if one is seeking Self-realisation?*

AS: Help each other on the path as friends. If there is any sexual desire you will lose some spiritual power. Even if you just look at someone and feel some desire towards them, you lose a little spiritual energy. In a family situation there are always strong attachments. The husband will give a lot of love to his wife and vice versa. Both will give a lot of love to the children. If you are serious about *sādhana*, remain unmarried and put all your energy into self-enquiry. You cannot hold onto the Self while you still have strong attachments to other people.

*Q: Some time ago, when we were together, we had an experience of ego death which lasted for some time. Then the ego came back again. Why did it rise after it had once completely disappeared?*

AS: If the ego rose again you did not experience ego death. It was probably just the mind sinking temporarily into the Self. Once the ego dies it can never rise again. Once the river reaches the sea it stays there. It does not flow back up the river bed again.

*Q: I have read a lot about Bhagavan's method of teaching through silence. You must have experienced it on many occasions. Can you explain how it operated?*

AS: If you enter a dark place with a lamp, light falls on everyone who is near you. You don't have to tell people, 'I have a light' because they will all be aware of its presence. In the presence of a *jnāni* like Bhagavan the spiritual darkness of devotees is put to flight by the radiant light of *jnāna*. In Bhagavan's case this light cleaned and calmed the minds of all who were near him. When mature devotees basked in this light they sometimes had an experience of the Self. The radiation of this spiritual power was Bhagavan's *mauna dīksha* [initiation through silence]. He radiated this power quite effortlessly. It was not done by an act of volition, it was a natural consequence of his realisation. Bhagavan didn't need to speak about the Self. He *was* the Self and he radiated its power all the time. Those who were receptive to this power needed no verbal explanations from Bhagavan. The spoken teachings were only for those who were not able to tune into his silent radiation.

*Q: Sometimes I feel that it is selfish to want Self-realisation because to achieve this one must be completely alienated from society and from other human beings. It seems that I must pursue sādhanā by myself and be indifferent to all the suffering people that I see around me.*

*If I ask these suffering people, 'Are you really suffering or is it just my imagination?', they will all say that their suffering is real. How can I deliberately ignore all this suffering that I see around me without feeling guilty about it?*

AS: There is no society, there is no suffering and there is no world. The world, the society and the suffering that you perceive are all part of your dream. They have no reality except in your own mind.

If you see a hungry man in your dream you can cook him a dream meal and give him some dream food. That will give him some temporary relief. If, instead, you wake up, you solve the problem permanently because you discover that the hungry man only existed in your imaginary dream world.

The world is like a reflection in a mirror. The world which we see is merely a reflection of our *gunas*, our own state of mind. We see the reflection, forget the mirror, and imagine that we are looking at a real world which is separate from us.

You are continuously radiating a mental energy which affects everything and everyone around you. If you are in a rajasic or a tamasic state you are automatically infecting the world with your unwholesome state of mind. The *jnāni*, who is established in the reality beyond the *gunas*, experiences only continuous peace and bliss. He alone can help other people by radiating this peace and bliss to them. If you try to help this world with some physical activity, the good that you do may be more than wiped out by the negative mental vibrations which you inflict on the world. If you make your mind pure, you automatically help everyone in the world because each person will receive a cleansing and healing measure of your own purity.

An ant is walking on the floor with a grain of sugar on its back. Suddenly a man steps on it and kills it. Finish: instant death. We are in the same situation as the ant, for death may come at any moment. You can take nothing with you when you die, not even your mind. So why not die to the world now?

The world that you are attached to is nothing more than a long dream. You may feel hungry in your dream and then wake up to

find that you are suffering from indigestion pains because you ate too much the night before. How much reality do you then give to the hunger pains that you felt in your dream?

If you see suffering all around you it is just a reflection of your own inner suffering. If you want to alleviate suffering go to the root cause which is the suffering inside yourself. Immerse yourself in the Self. End the *māyā* dream and wake up to the real world of *jnāna*. Your ideas about the world are all wrong because you are misperceiving it. Your mind is processing what you see in such a way that it makes you think that there is a suffering world outside and apart from you. If you want to get rid of that suffering world you must eliminate the mental processes that make you misperceive it. When you reach the state of *jnāna* there will be no misperceptions. Your vision will be completely clear. You will be aware that there is no suffering and no world. You will be aware that the Self alone exists.

## 21

*Q: I meditate a lot but most of the time I don't seem to get any results. When I cannot quieten my mind, is all my effort wasted, or will it bear fruit at some future time?*

AS: Most minds are like wet wood: they need a long period of drying out before they catch fire. While your mind is on the Self it is drying out. When it is on the world it is getting wet again. The effort you expend in keeping the mind turned towards the Self is never wasted. It is only wasted when you lose interest and revert to your old mental habits.

Don't worry if your efforts do not produce immediate results. Sooner or later you will get your reward.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa once told a story. Two *sādhus* who were friends agreed to do intense *tapas* together to attain the *darshan* of Kali. They had agreed beforehand that if she did not appear to them they would both kill themselves.

Their *tapas* was so intense that at about 1 a.m. one night the Goddess Kali appeared before them. One of the *sādhus* enjoyed the bliss which came from having *darshan* of the Goddess but the other lost consciousness and became comatose.

The man who was awake became very concerned about his

unconscious friend and asked Kali, 'We were both doing the same *sādhana*, yet when you came to give us *darshan* my friend became totally unconscious and went into a coma. Why this partiality? It does not seem fair because we have both done an equal amount of *tapas*.'

Kali replied: 'You have been doing this *tapas* for several lifetimes. In the past you lost consciousness just like this man. You can stay conscious now because of your previous practices and because your *karma* is finished. Your friend still has a lot of *karma* to experience. One day, when he has finished it all, he will have the same conscious experience that you are now having.'

*Q: When I first started meditating I had an intense desire for liberation. This period lasted for 3–4 years. In the last twelve months my enthusiasm has been slipping. I now seem to be more and more content with my worldly life.*

AS: The satisfaction which comes from the outside world is transient. At death it will all be lost. Human life is given to you for the sole purpose of realising the Self. If you die without realising the Self your life has been wasted. Death can come at any time. I am telling you this so that you will become aware of your own death. If you are constantly aware of the possibility that you may die at any moment, your enthusiasm will increase. Try to cultivate this awareness and see if it makes any difference to your *sādhana*.

*Q: You sometimes say that we should love all people equally; that we should give love to the whole world. For me, love is something that just happens. I cannot manufacture it and give it away. If I feel love for someone, the love flows towards them. If I don't, it doesn't happen and I can't make it happen. How do I learn to love people I hardly know? And when I have learned that, how do I learn to love all the millions of strangers I have never met and will never meet?*

AS: You can start with the people you know. Bhagavan taught by example that we should only see good in other people. Virtually all people are a mixture of good and bad. It is very rare to find someone who is wholly good or wholly bad. If you have to come into contact with a lot of people, try to make yourself aware of their good points and don't dwell on their bad points. If you see good in people you radiate a harmonious, loving energy which

uplifts those who are around you. If you can maintain this habit, this energy will soon turn into a steady flow of love.

Try to be aware at all times that everything you see and perceive is the Self. If you see the Self in other people, your love automatically flows towards them.

You gain nothing by thinking that someone is a bad person. If negative thoughts arise each time you see or think of a particular person, these thoughts will draw you away from the Self. Try to radiate your love equally to all people instead of just a few. Try to feel that the whole world is your Self, your God. Try to see the Self in all people. Spread your love in all directions as an act of worship and surrender, because everything in the world is a manifestation of God.

*Q: It is clear that vāsanās are not destroyed during sleep. Are they destroyed by nirvikalpa samādhi, or does this state have no effect on them?*

AS: Bhagavan taught that we should aim for *sahaja samādhi*<sup>\*</sup>, not *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He said that it was not necessary to experience *nirvikalpa samādhi* prior to enjoying *sahaja samādhi*.

One form of *nirvikalpa samādhi* is like *laya*, like deep sleep. There is peace while the *samādhi* persists, but when the experience is over the mind rises and the *vāsanās* become just as active as before.

*Laya* [temporary suspension of all mental faculties in a trance-like state] is virtually the same as sleep. Experiencing this state is not helpful to your *sādhana*. *Laya* is not meditation, it is unconsciousness; it is *tamōguna* in a very strong form. Meditation needs an awake mind, not an unconscious one. Sleep and *laya* increase the identification with the mind. You may feel a little peace during *laya*, but when you wake up from this state the mind becomes very active again and the peace is all lost.

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\* *Nirvikalpa* means 'no differences'. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* the mind disappears completely leaving behind it a temporary experience of the Self which is unmediated by the experience of the 'I'-thought. In this state one is not capable of thought or action because one has no awareness of either the body or the world. In *sahaja samādhi* (*sahaja* means 'natural') the mind has been permanently destroyed. There is permanent Self-awareness combined with an ability to function normally in the world. *Sahaja samādhi* is the state of the *jñāni*.

In the peace of the Self there are no *vāsanās*. If you can establish yourself in the Self, all *vāsanās* will be destroyed. Witness the *vāsanās* as they arise but don't identify with them or act on them. If you want to get rid of your *vāsanās* you must learn to practise non-involvement.

If you feel yourself identifying with a *vāsanā* when it starts to rise, remind yourself, 'This *vāsanā* is not me' and withdraw into the Self. If you learn to ignore your *vāsanās* in this way they will eventually stop rising.

*Q: I have been meditating for many years. Sometimes when I sit I feel a great energy which alternately straightens and arcs the torso. I am very aware of this power. It keeps my attention on the body and makes it very difficult for me to be aware of the Self.*

AS: The mind and the body are both inert. Any energy or peace you experience can only come from the Self. Drop the identity with the body. These experiences are making you too body-conscious. Just be aware of the Self and try to pay as little attention as possible to the body. The Self is pure energy, pure power. Hold onto that.

*Q: Is the energy one receives from the Self constant or does it fluctuate? Does the body or the mind store it in any way?*

AS: In deep sleep the mind and the body are renewed. On awakening there is a feeling of energy and bliss, but almost immediately the sense organs become active and desires arise. When this happens, the energy you have stored up during sleep gets dissipated. If you can control the mind and the senses so that neither of them succumbs to external stimuli, you can build up energy and power in the body.

Bhagavan was fond of telling the story of the lame monkey king<sup>9</sup> who had lost his power and position. He went alone to the forest for some days to regain his power. When he returned he had accumulated enough power and energy to take over his tribe again.

Energy is increased in solitude. When you are alone it is less likely to go out through the *indriyas* [the five senses] and the mind.

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<sup>9</sup> This monkey, called Nondippayan, which means 'the lame boy' in Tamil, lived on the hill when Bhagavan was living at Skandashram.

Arunagirinatha, the famous saint of Tiruvannamalai, once sang a song which says, 'The senses are thieves who steal the energy of the Self'.

*Q: Can't some use be made of this energy? What can one do with it?*

AS: *Sakti* is the Self and the Self is *sakti*. When you know that you are not the body or the mind, how can you do anything? In that state there will be no 'I' to instigate any activity. In that state everything will happen automatically.

Water in a lake sustains many life forms: fish and plants inside the water; trees, plants and animals along the shoreline. If you are filled with the energy of the Self, that energy flows out of you and nourishes everyone in your vicinity. You don't have to direct this power outwards. If you have done enough *tapas* this energy will flow of its own accord.

*Sakti* is the *sānti* of the Self. If you do *tapas* and if you don't dissipate your energy through sensory indulgence you will feel the power of the Self accumulating inside you. You can also feel it radiating outwards to the people around you. You don't lose your power when you radiate it naturally like this because the power of the Self is infinite. You only lose it if you move your attention away from the Self and get involved in pointless mental and sensory excesses.

## 22

*Q: Does Swami prefer that we keep quiet?*

AS: If you are silent, that is good. But if you have any doubts it is better to talk about them and get them cleared up.

*Q: I think that I am now beginning to grasp what the 'I am' is. It seems that this is something behind the body, behind the mind, and behind the awareness of the body. I think that we don't automatically make a relationship with this 'I am' because we feel that we lack a conscious acquaintance with it. We are accustomed to direct our attention outwards rather than inwards. We think about people and things because we are attached to them, and for no other reason. I am beginning to realise just how hard it is to give up this habit.*

AS: Let the mind go wherever it wants to go. You don't have to pay any attention to all its wanderings. Just be the Self and don't concern yourself with the activities of the mind. If you take this attitude, the activities and wanderings of the mind will become less and less.

The mind only wanders around all day because you identify with it and pay attention to all its activities. If you could establish yourself as consciousness alone, thoughts would no longer have any power to distract you. When you have no interest in thoughts they fade away as soon as they appear. Instead of attaching themselves to other thoughts, which then spin off countless other thoughts and ideas, they just appear for a second or two and then vanish. One's *vāsanās* make thoughts arise. Once they have arisen, they will repeat themselves in regular chains and patterns again and again. If you have any desires or attachments, thoughts about them will be constantly appearing in the mind. You cannot fight them because they thrive on the attention you give them. If you try to repress them, you can only do it by giving them attention. And that means identifying with the mind. This method never works. You can only stop the flow of thoughts by refusing to have any interest in it.

If you remain in the source, the Self, you can easily catch each thought as it rises. If you don't catch the thoughts as they rise, they sprout, become plants and, if you still neglect them, they grow into great trees. Usually, the inattentive *sādhaka* only catches his thoughts at the tree stage.

If you can be continuously aware of each thought as it rises, and if you can be so indifferent to it that it doesn't sprout or flourish, you are well on the way to escaping from the entanglements of the mind.

*Q: It is relatively easy to do this for some time. But then inattentiveness takes over and the trees flourish again.*

AS: Continuous attentiveness will only come with long practice. If you are truly watchful, each thought will dissolve at the moment that it appears. But to reach this level of disassociation you must have no attachments at all. If you have the slightest interest in any particular thought, it will evade your attentiveness, connect with other thoughts, and take over your mind for a few seconds. This will happen more easily if you are accustomed to reacting emo-

tionally to a particular thought. If a particular thought causes emotions like worry, anger, love, hate, or jealousy to appear in you, these reactions will attach themselves to the rising thoughts and make them stronger. These reactions often cause you to lose your attention for a second or two. That kind of lapse gives the thought more than enough time to grow and flourish.

You must be completely impassive and detached when thoughts of this kind appear. Your desires and your attachments are simply reactions to thoughts that appear in consciousness. You can conquer them both by not reacting to new thoughts that arise.

You can transcend the mind completely by not paying any attention to its contents. And once you have gone beyond the mind you never need be troubled by it again.

After his realisation King Janaka said, 'Now I have found the thief who has been stealing my happiness. I will not allow him to do this any more.' The thief who had been stealing his happiness was his mind.

If you are always watching with open eyes, thieves cannot enter. They can only break in while you are asleep and snoring. Similarly, if you are continuously alert, the mind cannot delude you. It will only take over if you fail to keep your attention on rising thoughts.

*Q: It is fairly easy to stop a thief from breaking into a house. You just lock the door. But in this particular case the thief is already inside. First we have to catch him and throw him out. Only then can we safely close the door.*

AS: To believe that this thief is something real, something that has to be fought and caught, is just like believing that your shadow is some kind of alien intruder who needs to be fought and expelled. If you try to raise your hand to hit your shadow, your shadow will also raise its hand to hit you. You cannot win a fight with your mind because all your fights will be like shadow-boxing. You cannot knock out your shadow by hitting it because there is nothing there to receive the blow. The shadow will keep dancing around for as long as you keep dancing around trying to hit it. There are no winners in a fight like this, only a lot of frustrated losers. If you start from the assumption that the mind is real and that you have to fight it and control it by manipulating your thoughts in some way, the mind will get stronger, not weaker. If a

particular *sādhana* assumes that the mind is real, the practising of that *sādhana* will perpetuate the mind rather than eliminate it.

The ego is just like a ghost. It has no real form of its own. If you see what the ego really is by enquiring 'Who am I?' it will simply run away. The mind has no substance and no form. It exists only in the imagination. If you want to get rid of something that is imaginary, all you have to do is cease to imagine it. Alternatively, if you can be continuously aware that the mind and all its creations only exist in your imagination, they will cease to delude you and you will cease to be troubled by them. For example, if a magician creates a tiger, you need not be afraid of it because you know that he is only trying to trick you into believing that it is a real and dangerous tiger. If you don't believe that the tiger is real or dangerous, you don't get afraid.

When the cinema was first introduced here some village people became afraid when they saw things like fire on the screen. They ran away because they believed that the fire would spread and burn the theatre down. When you know that everything that is happening is only appearing on the screen of consciousness, and that you yourself are the screen on which it all appears, nothing can touch you, harm you or make you afraid.

People who believe in the reality of the world are really no better than people who build dams to catch the water that they see in a mirage.

*Q: Sometimes everything is so clear and peaceful. There are times when it is easy to look at the workings of the mind and see that what Swami says is true. At other times no amount of effort makes any impression on our chaotic minds.*

AS: Whenever we are in a meditative state, all is clear. Then *vāsanās* which have previously been hidden within the mind arise and cover this clarity. There is no easy solution to this problem. You have to keep up the enquiry, 'To whom is this happening?' all the time. If you are having trouble, remind yourself, 'This is just happening on the surface of my mind. I am not this mind or the wandering thoughts.' Then go back to the enquiry 'Who am I?' By doing this you penetrate deeper and deeper and become detached from the mind. This will only come about after you have made an intense effort.

If you already have a little clarity and peace, when you make

the enquiry 'Who am I?' the mind sinks into the Self and dissolves, leaving only the subjective awareness 'I-I'. Bhagavan explained all this to me in great detail when I was going for his *darshan* between 1938 and 1942.

*Q: It must have been wonderful to have had such a great Guru to guide you. Where can one find such a person today?*

AS: It is difficult for most people to find a qualified Guru because ordinary people cannot tell who has realised the Self. Bhagavan once told me a long story which illustrates this very well.

Many centuries ago there was a *jnāni* in Srirangam, a town near Trichy. Every day this *jnāni* went to the Cauvery River to take a bath. When he began the walk he would place his hands on the shoulders of two of his devotees to support himself. He did not like to touch them directly so he put some silk cloths on the devotees' shoulders. Every day he walked like this for one mile to the river to take a bath. On his return journey he would support himself in the same way.

One day this *jnāni* and his disciples were walking to the river as usual. In the distance they saw a sudra [a member of the lowest caste] walking with his beautiful wife. Both of them appeared to be walking towards a festival that was taking place on the other side of the river. Because the sun was very hot, the wife could not walk on the hot sand. The man was helping her by putting one of his *dhōtis* on the sand for her to walk on. When she reached the end of the *dhōti* he would put another *dhōti* on the sand and pick up the first one. In this way she was able to walk along without burning her feet. The disciples of the *jnāni* observed all this and commented about it to the Guru.

'See what a great attachment this man has for his wife! He is putting his *dhōtis* on the ground one by one just to make a cool path for her.'

On the way to the river the couple and the *jnāni* met.

The Guru, with great curiosity, asked the man, 'I have never seen any husband treating his wife like this. Why are you behaving in this manner?'

The man replied, 'She is my God. Just looking into her eyes makes me feel very happy. When I look at her cheeks, her face, or at any other part of her body, I always feel very happy. She is also wearing a lot of gold ornaments which make her look even more

beautiful. Even her name is Ponni [*pon* means 'gold' in Tamil]. When I look at her beauty and all this gold I feel tremendously happy. She is just like a goddess for me.'

The Guru told him, 'You have been deluded by the appearance of the body. What is in the eyes? Just water and skin. What is in the body? Just blood, muscles and bone. You have been deluded by the appearance of the body. I have never seen a man who was covered by so much *māyā*.'

Then the Guru continued: 'Only dogs like muscles and bones. Just like these animals you have a great lust for pieces of meat. In future, when she is affected by some serious illness, her beauty will go. When she dies, there will be no body and no beauty. So why do you have so much attachment to this perishable body? This is not the purpose of a human birth. Instead of wasting your time worshipping this body, try to realise that which is immortal, the Self. That is the only purpose of human existence.'

This man had a mind that was ready for teachings about the Self. When he heard the Guru's words he immediately decided to carry them out.

He said to his wife, 'You go your way. From now on I will be going with this Guru.'

He went with the Guru and the woman went back to her house to live alone.

The husband followed the Guru to his ashram. It was a big ashram with a lot of buildings. The Guru needed a man who could stay awake all night to watch the ashram so this new devotee became the night watchman. His name, incidentally, was Villi.

He soon became a very good devotee. Whatever the Guru told him to do, he would immediately do it with humility and love. Because of this attitude the Guru soon came to have a lot of love for him. The other disciples, who were all brahmins, started to become jealous of Villi.

'This man came after we did,' they said to each other. 'He is a sudra, not a brahmin, but our Guru seems to have a lot of love for him.'

The jealousy of these disciples increased day by day. Eventually they decided that they would make it appear that Villi had done some crime so that the Guru would have to send him away.

The Guru knew what was going on in the minds of these disciples so he himself decided to play a trick on them. One day

the brahmin devotees washed their clothes and put them out to dry. While the clothes were drying they went to sleep. During this time the Guru took all the clothes and hid them.

When the disciples woke up and saw that all their clothes were missing, they came and told the Guru, 'This Villi has stolen all our clothes. You should send him out of the ashram.'

The Guru called Villi and told him, 'All these people are against you. What can I do? Go back to your home and meditate on the Self there. The Self is limitless. It is everywhere. You can do this meditation in the home. You don't need to stay here to do it.'

Villi went back to his house without making any complaint. He obeyed the words of his Guru and spent his time meditating on the Self. He had no attachment to the world or his wife any more. He just sat for most of each day and meditated.

One day Villi was walking towards the river when the Guru came there for his usual bath. The Guru could not hide his love for the disciple. He went up to Villi, embraced him and asked him how he was getting on.

On seeing this the brahmin disciples became very jealous again.

'What kind of Guru is this?' they asked. 'He acts with such partiality. He will not touch our bodies—he puts silk cloths between his hands and our shoulders—but he went and embraced this man. This man is a sudra who probably eats meat. He even lives with his wife. How can our Guru treat such a bad man like this?'

When the Guru came back to them they asked him why he had behaved like this. They even complained to him about his partiality.

In response, to show the purity of Valli, the Guru suggested that the disciples play a trick.

The Guru said to them, 'Tonight, go to Villi's house and steal all the gold ornaments that his wife is wearing'.

The disciples initially objected: 'No! No! We cannot do that. Stealing is a sin.'

The Guru told them, 'I am commanding this, so you must do it'.

The disciples reluctantly agreed to carry out the order. In the middle of the night they broke into Villi's house. Villi was sleeping

in one of the rooms and his wife was sleeping next to him, lying on her side. The disciples carefully took the ornaments from the outer hand.

While they were trying to remove the ornaments from the other hand the wife woke up and began shouting, 'Thieves! Thieves!' The disciples ran away with all the gold they had managed to collect, handed it over to the Guru and gave him an account of what had happened.

Meanwhile, Villi woke up and saw that his wife was crying and shouting 'Thieves! Thieves!'

Instead of comiserating with her he told her, 'You are a bad woman! You have too much attachment to your gold. From now on I will not take any food from your hands. If I take food from such a woman, who is so attached to gold, my meditation will be affected. What does it matter if thieves have stolen your gold? You should not have been so attached to it. From now on, you cook your food in one place. I will cook my food somewhere else. Starting tomorrow, we will live separately.'

From that day on the two of them lived separately in the same house. The wife naturally became very upset at the treatment she was receiving. She complained to the neighbours and to the women who came for water at the well. She even went and complained to the Guru.

'I did not do any harm,' she told everyone. 'I never made any mistakes. I just shouted "Thieves! Thieves!" when some thieves broke in and stole all my gold. My husband has punished me for this. Now he cooks his own food and eats it alone. He will not even talk to me. You cannot see such a useless husband anywhere in the world!'

The Guru asked his disciples to go and see what was going on in Villi's house. They went to the village and listened to the women gossiping about Villi and his wife. Then they went back to the Guru and told him what the women had been saying.

The Guru said, 'Villi is seemingly living in *samsāra* but he has no attachment to gold or money. He is not even attached to his wife. That is why I felt such love for him when I saw him by the river. Now, after seeing how he lives, you can understand. You are living as brahmins, as *brahmachāris*, but you have not yet reached that state of detachment. Villi is now living in the *sahaja* [natural] state [the state of Self-realisation].

After Villi had attained that state of *jnāna* many visitors started to come to see him. He lived simply in a hut and taught the path of *jnāna*. After some time a small village was built around him to accommodate the visitors and the devotees. The village was called Villiputtur. It is still existing today. Villi eventually became known as Villiputtur Alvar and he is now revered as one of the greatest of the Vaishnavite saints.

So, who can tell who is a *jnāni* and who is not? These *brahm-achāri* disciples had spent years meditating with a *jnāni* and doing service to him, but they were not able to recognise Villi's greatness until the Guru pointed it out to them. One has to have a pure mind and good *karma* to find a Guru and recognise him.

Bhagavan once told this story in the old hall. After he had finished speaking one of the attendants turned on the radio. The radio announcer immediately said, 'We will now hear the story of Villiputtur Alvar'. And the man who told the story on the radio told it just as Bhagavan had.

When the story was finished the announcer said, '*Namaskāram* to all'.

Bhagavan remarked, 'If he said "*Namaskāram* to all," he himself is also included'.

I heard Bhagavan tell this story on another occasion. I was about to leave the hall when Bhagavan intervened and asked me to stay. Then he recounted this story in full. Because of this intervention I felt that he was telling this story just for my benefit. I think that Bhagavan wanted to make it clear to me that one can only make progress on the spiritual path if one is prepared to give up all one's attachments.

## 23

*Q: On several occasions I have listened to Swami tell stories about the time he spent with Bhagavan. Whenever I hear them I am always impressed with the amount of faith that Swami had in Bhagavan. It seems to me, as I listen to these stories, that it was this faith which enabled Swami to surrender so completely.*

*AS: The grace of the Guru and the proximity to the Guru gave me the confidence and the faith to surrender.*

*Q: Your faith was so strong that I found myself crying when I heard some of the stories. I was so touched by them.*

AS: Now that you are talking about surrender, I am suddenly reminded of one incident in the ashram which gave me an opportunity to surrender to Bhagavan. Once, early in the morning, Bhagavan was cutting banana flowers in the kitchen. These banana flowers, when cut, release a black gum-like substance which sticks to the fingers. To remove this gum Bhagavan had rubbed some tamarind into his hands. Then, for some reason, he decided to go for a walk near the foot of the hill. I met him, at about 7 a.m., just outside the back gate. Bhagavan noticed that I had a *kamandalu* [water pot] in my hand and asked me to pour some water into his hands so that he could wash the remains of the tamarind off them.

Thinking that this was a good opportunity to offer myself to Bhagavan, I said to myself as I poured a little water into his hands, 'I am surrendering my body, soul and mind to the Guru'.

Bhagavan smiled and indicated with a gesture that he needed more water.

I poured a little more, repeating the same thought: 'I am surrendering my body, mind and soul to the Guru.'

Bhagavan was still not satisfied with my offer.

'More!' he said.

For the third time I poured the water and repeated the same phrase.

After this third pouring, and the third offer of surrender, Bhagavan looked at me and said, 'Enough'. I felt that my offer of surrender had been accepted.

I was motivated to act like this by a story which I had read. The *avatāra* Vamana once asked King Mahabali to surrender to him. As a token of that surrender he asked King Mahabali to pour water three times.

Sukhacharya, King Mahabali's Guru, warned him in advance: 'If you surrender like this, Vishnu will take everything from you. He will take your kingdom as well as all your possessions.'

Mahabali, who was determined to surrender, refused to listen. He began to pour water from his *kamandalu*.

Sukhacharya, his Guru, had many *siddhis*. He took the form of a large bee, entered the spout of the king's *kamandalu* and blocked the flow of water with his body. Vamana knew what he

was trying to do so he poked the spout of the *kamandalu* with a stick. The stick caught Sukhacharya on the head in such a way that he became blind in one eye.

Then King Mahabali poured water three times and surrendered his mind, his soul, his kingdom and all his possessions to Vamana.

When Bhagavan asked me to pour water I was reminded of this story. Bhagavan must have been aware of my thoughts because he helped me to re-enact the story by asking me to pour water three times.

In the original story King Mahabali surrendered himself so completely that he attained *jñāna* immediately. Like King Janaka,<sup>10</sup> he was ready and willing to give up everything he had in a single act of surrender. If you have attained this degree of spiritual maturity, you can get *jñāna* by a single act of surrender.

*Q: Surrender is a mental attitude. When we are sitting in front of the Guru it is relatively easy because there is a constant awareness of his form. But how can one surrender if one is a long way away from him?*

AS: Bhagavan himself taught that if we practise his teachings and remember his form we can be in touch with him wherever we are. If one has received the opportunity to surrender to the Guru, physical distance does not matter. In fact, if your faith is strong and if your practice is continuous, it is sometimes easier to have better contact at a distance.

*Q: Is this thing a physical thing? This feeling, this connection between the Guru and oneself, do we feel it only in the Heart, or is it also in the mind?*

AS: Heart contact is the best. But if you practise well, you can also feel it in the mind.

*Q: I am asking these questions because at the moment I am trying with my mind to feel some love and devotion towards this 'I am'*

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<sup>10</sup> In a similar story in *Yōga Vāsishṭa* King Janaka surrendered everything he had to the sage Ashtavakra and realised the Self. He made his offer of surrender as he was mounting a horse and realised the Self before he managed to get his second foot in its stirrup.

*which I feel is the real form of Bhagavan. But this is a very difficult thing to do. There is no pleasure in it. It is a perpetual struggle. Am I doing something wrong?*

AS: If you can focus your mind on this 'I am' you need not do anything else. You do not have to cultivate a particular attitude towards it. If you keep your attention on it, it will eventually reveal all its secrets to you.

If you focus your mind on this 'I am', this immanent consciousness, and if you can establish yourself there for some time, you will begin to experience some peace. When the thought processes are not present, even for a moment, one gets a lot of spiritual energy. When that energy and that feeling of peace come, one gets more encouragement, more enthusiasm. When you have had a little experience of the peace and bliss of the Self you always feel a determination to go back for more. Once you get this enthusiasm and this determination, the feeling of struggling unsuccessfully gradually diminishes.

*Q: I know that peace will eventually come but at the moment I need to make a great effort to get even a little taste of it.*

AS: Ramakrishna Paramahansa once told a story about a *jnāni* who had done a lot of *tapas* in a jungle. One day he went out of the jungle and met a poor man who was carrying a bundle of firewood. This woodcutter saw that the *jnāni* was radiating peace and bliss.

'Swami,' he asked, 'it seems that you have so much happiness. There is no trace of worry at all on your face. You are obviously a great man. Please show me some way that I can become rich. I am very poor. I barely make a living by cutting this firewood and selling it in town. As I have to struggle a lot to survive I often get very frustrated with this way of life.'

The *jnāni* asked him, 'Where are you cutting this wood?' and the man replied, 'Just at the edge of the forest'.

The *jnāni* told him, 'Tomorrow, go further inside and see what you can find there'.

The next day the woodcutter went further into the jungle than usual and found some sandalwood trees. He cut these trees, sold them in the market and made a lot of money. But he was not satisfied with this money so he came back to the *jnāni* and asked him how he could make even more.

The *jnāni* repeated his original advice: 'Go further into the jungle.'

The next day the woodcutter went deep into the jungle and found a lot of brass vessels which someone had abandoned there.

He thought to himself, 'The further I go into this forest the more riches I seem to find. I will leave this brass and go a little further.'

In the middle of the forest he found some gold and became a wealthy man.

I am telling you this story to show that when we desire to get away from all the troubles that identifying with the body causes us, we can go inwards, towards the Self. Instead of toiling and suffering in the mind, which is the outer edge of consciousness, we should move towards the Self, the centre of our being.

As we start to move inwards we experience the peace and bliss of the Self in a very diluted form. The deeper we go, the stronger the experience becomes. Eventually a time will come when we don't want to leave this experience at all. Instead, there is a continuous urge to go deeper and deeper into the Self. When you lose all desires and attachments, the pure gold of the Self will reveal itself to you. In that final state you don't experience peace and bliss. You are that peace and bliss. In that state you are the equal of Siva.

You are saying that you have to make a great effort to experience even a little peace. Don't worry about this. Your effort will pay off sooner or later. If you persevere the peace and bliss will come unasked. If you give up your attachment to all thoughts except for the thought of the Self, you will find yourself being pulled automatically into the peace of the Self. If you practise intensively and correctly you will find that the experience of this peace is addictive. When this happens you will lose interest in everything except the Self.

## 24

*Q: Is the relationship between the Guru and the disciple a real relationship or a mâyā relationship? If it is a mâyā relationship, how can it help us to transcend mâyā?*

AS: Bhagavan used to give, as an example, the story of an elephant which dreamed that it was being attacked by a lion. The shock of seeing the lion in the dream was sufficient to wake the

elephant up. The Guru, according to Bhagavan, is the roaring lion who appears in our *māyā* dream and shocks us so much that we wake up into *jnāna*. While the dream is in progress the lion is very real for us, but when we wake up there is no lion and no dream. In the state of *jnāna* we become aware that there was no Guru and no disciple; there is only the Self.

But we should not have that attitude prior to realisation. While we are still trapped by *māyā* we must accept the Guru-disciple relationship as being real because this relationship provides the only way of transcending all the wrong ideas we have about ourselves. Even though we may know intellectually that all is one, we should revere the form of the Guru because it is only through his grace that our ignorance can be dissolved. We should respect the Guru and his teachings at all times. We cannot do this if we start treating him as an ordinary person who is no different from any other manifestation of the Self. Respect for the Guru and faith in his teachings are essential for all those who want to make progress.

The outer Guru appears to tell us about the reality of the Self, who is the inner Guru. With our defective vision we cannot see or experience for ourselves that this is true. The inner Guru pulls us towards the Self and establishes us there. The inner Guru is waiting at all times to perform this function but he cannot begin until we turn our attention towards him.

It is the outer Guru who tells us, 'Turn within. Put your attention on the inner Guru and let him pull you back into your source.'

In addition to giving these instructions, the outer Guru transmits his grace to us, cleans our minds, and pushes them towards the inner Guru, the Self.

All Gurus are the Self. All Gurus are formless. And all Gurus are ultimately one and the same. The outer forms of the Guru may appear differently to different people but there is really only one Guru and that Guru is the Self. When we reach spiritual maturity, the Self manifests to us in the form of a Guru in order to help us to make further progress with our *sādhana*.

The relationship with the outer Guru lasts as long as it is necessary. It lasts until the *śishya* [disciple] knows from direct experience that the Self alone exists. In my case a time came when it was no longer physically possible for me to be with the form of

the Guru. Bhagavan severed the physical relationship because he wanted me to be aware of him as he really is. When you pass your exams at school, you graduate to the next class. We cannot enter the same class again. I graduated from regarding Bhagavan as a form and came to regard him as the formless Self. After that I was never given the chance to have a relationship with Bhagavan's physical form again.

Other disciples were treated differently. The Guru does not give the same treatment to all. He looks at the maturity and the predilections of each disciple and gives an appropriate *sādhana* to each one. For example, Bhagavan encouraged some of his devotees to sing devotional songs because that was an appropriate path for them. In my case he encouraged me to be aware of the formless Self.

When a calf is very young its mother gives it milk whenever it is hungry. But after it has learned to eat grass the mother gives it a kick whenever it tries to drink milk again. After I had learned to make contact with the formless Self, Bhagavan gave me a kick when I still tried to carry on drinking the grace from his physical form. He wanted to wean me from his form. He wanted me to get all my spiritual nourishment from the formless Self.

One should not leave the Guru thinking that one has learned everything from him. That is a very arrogant attitude. One should only leave the Guru if he tells us to go. Until then we have to stay and learn our lessons from him.

Each of us will meet a different form of the Guru. The form we meet depends on our maturity and our spiritual ripeness. Each Guru gives out different teachings, and often one Guru will give different teachings to different disciples. It is a question of maturity and temperament. The disciples in the kindergarden class will get kindergarden lessons while the disciples in the college class will get college-level teachings. And within each class there will be different lessons for each disciple. Some may be told to follow a *bhakti* path while others may be told to do meditation on the Self.

The many different paths that are taught are really only preparations for Bhagavan's path. Ultimately, one must learn to abide in the Self by meditation on the Self or by self-enquiry or by complete surrender. Unfortunately, there are very few people who are spiritually mature enough to follow Bhagavan's highest teach-

ings. Most people have to follow other paths until they are ready for the final path.

Your original question was, 'Is the Guru-disciple relationship real?' From the standpoint of the Self one would have to say that it is all *māyā*, but one could add that it is the best kind of *māyā*. One can use a thorn to remove another thorn. Similarly, one can use the *māyā*-like Guru-disciple relationship to root out *māyā* in all its manifestations. *Māyā* is so firmly established in us that only the illusory Guru-lion in our dream can give us a big enough shock to wake us.

## Mahasamadhi

Till the end of his life Annamalai Swami lived peacefully and silently in his little ashram at Palakothu leaving it only for short walks nearby. In the eighties many seekers, mainly Westerners, began to visit him attracted by the power of his silence and the strong feeling of peace, harmony and clarity that surrounded him. He shared with them his love for Bhagavan and his perfect knowledge of Bhagavan's teachings which he had fully realized. He also provided them spiritual guidance. He did it with much love and humour.

During the last year of his life some great souls and some jnanis - so said Swamiji after their departure - visited him.

On 9.11.95 at 4.45 am, Sri Annamalai Swami attained mahasamadhi. He was peacefully and silently absorbed in the Self. After his mahasamadhi, there was great radiance in his face and eyes. All devotees felt it.

His body has been placed in rest in the samadhi temple already built by his devotees in Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram. A shivalingam has been installed. Regular poojas are performed in the samadhi temple. Swamiji's presence is felt always full in Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram; only the body is dropped; He is everywhere.

The ashram established by him is managed by the Trust formed by him.

*Who was really Annamalai Swami? Who knows?*

For many he was Bhagavan himself in a very humble and discreet form. In the very last weeks of his life, after a devotee had offered him a big size photograph of him sitting on a rock with Arunachala in background, he several times told an incident which happened in Bhagavan's hall: Two devotees asked Bhagavan: "Who is Arunagiri Yogi and where is he residing? Bhagavan pointed to me and said : "He is Arunagiri Yogi". The devotees were so shocked that Bhagavan then jokingly added : "His name is Annamalai, isn't it". Once, after swami had told this story, a devotee said : "Then we are very lucky because Arunagiri Yogi has come down to the southern side of Arunachala to bless us." "All is happening according to Bhagavan's plans," humbly, secretly and smilingly told swamiji.

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## Glossary

<i>advaita</i>	literally 'not two'. A school of <i>Vēdānta</i> which asserts that <i>Brahman</i> alone exists, and that the world and the individual self are illusory appearances within it.
<i>ajnāna</i>	ignorance, particularly ignorance of the Self.
<i>ajnāni</i>	one who is ignorant of his true nature; someone who is unenlightened.
<i>Aksharamanamālai</i>	<i>The Marital Garland of Letters</i> ; a 108 verse poem, addressed to Arunachala, composed by Ramana Maharshi around 1913.
<i>Ālvārs</i>	a group of Vaishnavite saints who lived in South India more than 1,000 years ago.
<i>ānanda</i>	bliss; one of the fundamental aspects or properties of the Self.
Annamalai	a Tamil name for Arunachala. It means 'unreachable or unapproachable mountain'.
<i>anushtānas</i>	rites and rituals traditionally performed by brahmins. Some are spiritual and some relate to personal hygiene.
<i>āsana</i>	yogic posture or position.
<i>avatāra</i>	God incarnate in a physical form; in particular, one of the nine forms in which Vishnu has incarnated on earth.
aviyal	a South Indian dish made out of vegetables, coconut and curd.
<i>bhajan</i>	devotional song.
<i>bhakta</i>	a devotee, one who has devotion.
<i>bhakti</i>	devotion; the state of devotion.
<i>bhikshā</i>	food received as alms; the giving of such food; the act of going out to beg for it.
<i>Brahman</i>	the impersonal absolute reality of Hinduism.
<i>crore</i>	ten million.
<i>darshan</i>	'sight'; to see or be seen by a holy man or temple deity.

<i>mōksha</i>	liberation, enlightenment.
<i>mukta</i>	one who has attained liberation or enlightenment.
<i>mukti</i>	the state of liberation or enlightenment.
<i>namaskāram</i>	a prostration on the ground done as an act of respect or veneration.
<i>Navarātri</i>	literally 'nine nights'; a ten-day festival, usually occurring in October, in which a different aspect of the female divinity is worshipped on successive days.
<i>nirvikalpa</i>	'no differences'; it generally denotes a kind of <i>samādhi</i> in which there is a full experience of the Self, but no awareness of either the body or the world.
<i>nishthā</i>	literally 'balanced' or 'in a state of equilibrium'. The term generally denotes the state of being permanently established in the Self.
<i>nungu</i>	palmyra fruit, looking a little like a purple coconut. It has three lens-shaped fruits inside which are embedded in the fibre of the shell.
<i>padmāsana</i>	the full-lotus posture; a cross-legged position in which the heels rest on top of the thighs.
<i>pandal</i>	a temporary canopy; in South India they are usually made from bamboo and matted coconut leaves.
<i>pāpam</i>	sins; the karmic consequences of immoral acts.
<i>pārāyana</i>	the chanting of scriptural works.
<i>pāthasālā</i>	school which teaches knowledge of the <i>Vēdas</i> (and the correct chanting of them) to brahmin boys.
<i>pongal</i>	a dish consisting of rice, lentils and a few spices.
<i>pradakshina</i>	circumambulation of an object, person or shrine as an act of veneration or worship. In this book it refers to circumambulation of Arunachala.
<i>prāna</i>	the vital energy which sustains the activities of the body and the mind. It is associated with the breath.

<i>prānāyāma</i>	breathing exercises designed to manipulate or control the <i>prāna</i> . Yoga philosophy holds that the mind and the breath are connected: control of one therefore leads to control of the other.
<i>prārabdha</i>	that part of one's <i>karma</i> which must be worked out in the present life. Because the law of <i>karma</i> implies determinism in human activities, <i>prārabdha</i> is often translated as destiny.
<i>prasād</i>	anything which is offered to a Guru or deity becomes <i>prasād</i> when it is returned to the devotee. Food is the most common form of <i>prasād</i> .
<i>pūjā</i>	the ceremonial worship of a Hindu deity.
<i>punya</i>	merits accumulated from performing good acts.
<i>rajas</i>	see <i>gunas</i> .
<i>rajoguna</i>	see <i>gunas</i> .
<i>rasam</i>	a spicy soup whose principal ingredients are pepper and tamarind.
<i>rishi</i>	'seer'; a vedic term denoting one who sees into the inner meanings of scriptural truths. One of Bhagavan's titles was 'Maharshi' meaning 'great seer'.
<i>Sadguru</i>	a fully-enlightened Guru who has the power to establish disciples in his own state.
<i>sādhana</i>	a spiritual method or practice.
<i>sādhu</i>	a full-time spiritual seeker, usually one who has given up family life in order to pursue a spiritual goal.
<i>sahaja</i>	'natural'; <i>sahaja samādhi</i> , the state of permanent realisation in which the mind has been irrevocably destroyed.
<i>sakti</i>	energy, power; the dynamic aspect of the Self which causes manifestation to appear.
<i>samādhi</i>	a trance-like state in which one experiences the Self, reality. Bhagavan distinguished between <i>nirvikalpa samādhi</i> , which is a tem-

	porary experience of the Self in which the body and the world are absent, and <i>sahaja samādhi</i> ( <i>sahaja</i> means 'natural'), the state of permanent realisation in which one can function normally in the world. The word also denotes the shrine or grave of a saint.
sambar	a spicy South Indian sauce. Eaten with rice, it is an essential component of all South Indian meals.
samsāra	the circuit of mundane existence; the cycle of birth and death; worldly illusion.
samskāra	mental habit or predisposition; a latent impression in the mind, especially one caused by tendencies in previous lives.
sanchita karma	'the storehouse of <i>karma</i> '; the accumulated <i>karma</i> of all previous births, a small portion of which is experienced as <i>prārabdha karma</i> in the present life.
sannyāsa	the final stage of Hindu life in which one leaves worldly cares and the family life for a wandering life as a mendicant monk.
sannyāsin	one who has taken the vows of <i>sannyāsa</i> ; a monk who has renounced the world in order to pursue the goal of enlightenment full-time.
sānti	peace; one of the fundamental aspects or properties of the Self.
sarvādhikārī	'the ruler of all'; a title assumed by Chinna-swami, Bhagavan's brother, when he took over the management of Sri Ramanasramam.
sāstras	scriptures; more specifically, the canonical works of Hinduism.
sat	being, reality, truth.
satsang	'association with <i>sat</i> '; this may take the form of an association with a realised being or it may be an internal association with one's own Self.
sattva	see <i>gunas</i> .
sattva guna	see <i>gunas</i> .
siddhi	'attainment' or 'accomplishment'; usually re-

	fers to the acquisition of supernatural powers such as telepathy or clairvoyance.
<i>sthapati</i>	temple architect or sculptor.
<i>tamas</i>	see <i>gunās</i> .
<i>tapas</i>	usually this means meditation connected with the practice of personal self-denial or bodily mortification. The deprivations inherent in <i>tapas</i> are believed to speed up spiritual progress. <i>Tapas</i> comes from a Sanskrit word whose root means 'heat'. To do <i>tapas</i> is to burn off one's impurities by intense spiritual practice.
Teertham	sacred waters, usually in the form of a square pond, with steps leading down to the water.
<i>upadēsa</i>	spiritual teachings, particularly those given by a Guru to a disciple.
vadai	a crunchy, deep-fried savoury made from dhal flour, spices and vegetables.
<i>vairāgya</i>	detachment.
<i>vāsanās</i>	the impressions of anything remaining unconscious in the mind; the present consciousness of past perceptions; knowledge derived from memory; latent tendencies of the mind formed by former actions, thoughts and desires.
<i>Vēdānta</i>	See <i>Vēdas</i> .
<i>Vēdas</i>	Four collections of scriptures dating from 2,000 BC to 500 BC which are the ultimate source of authority for most Hindus. The <i>Upanishads</i> form the final part of each <i>Vēda</i> . <i>Vēdānta</i> is the philosophy derived from the Upanishadic texts.
<i>vibhūti</i>	sacred ash which is smeared on the forehead and occasionally on other parts of the body.



## Annamalai Swami

Sri Ramana Maharshi is one of the greatest and most widely-respected Gurus that India has ever produced. His powerful presence, his radical teaching of self-inquiry and his exemplary life are even today still attracting new followers.

Annamalai Swami was a direct disciple who moved closely with him over a period of many years. This is his story. It is an inspiring and moving account of what it was like to live and work in the close presence of Sri Ramana. This is a classic Guru-disciple encounter, an arduous spiritual journey which highlights the grace of the Guru and the activities of the community that surrounds him.

Annamalai Swami himself became enlightened by the grace of his Guru, with scores of devotees of his own. For over 50 years he never left his small ashram compound next door to Sri Ramanasramam, the ashram of his beloved Guru, where he attained Mahasamadhi on November 9, 1995.

David Godman has lived in India for almost twenty years, most of that time at the ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi. This is his fourth book on the teaching of Sri Ramana and the lives of his disciples.